

FÉO: A ROMANCE



FÉO : A Romance
by Max Pemberton

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'Women, like princes, find few real friends.'

LORD LYTTTELTON: *Advice to a Lady.*



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CHAPTER I

THE SINGER

THERE were bells and caps for a sunny day of May ringing and nodding in the world of Vanity Fair; but a shower falling late in the afternoon sent the players hurrying to their homes again. Féo, leaning upon the window-sill of her gloomy flat in Oxford Street, looked down at the press of carriages rolling westward, and a little joy of envy came to her because of the spiteful drops which thus could rout so gay an army. How the dressmakers would rejoice to-morrow! she thought. How the maids would catch it when some of these great ladies were at home again! It was pitiful to see the victorias held there at the corner by the forbidding hand of the grammarless law, while the shower ruined divine chifcons and muslins, over which Worth might have shed tears. And the dowagers—the hard, set look upon their faces, their deep, sepulchral voices as they asked again and again, ‘Why are *we* waiting here?’ Odd that a little sprinkle of

the summer rain, fresh as the kiss of dew upon the grass, should betray to all the world that other self hidden ever while the sun shone and there was blue in the sky which May had given! Féo laughed aloud at the duchess's distress, and laughing, awoke her father, who remembered that it was time for tea.

'Is that you, Féo?'

'Who else should it be, father?'

'Why do you keep the window open when it is raining?'

Féo shrugged her shoulders, and shut the window with a slam.

'I thought you would like a little fresh air,' she said; 'it's suffocating here.'

Old Georges de Berthier, her father, took up his snuff-box irritably, and began to fidget in his chair.

'Why is the tea not ready? That woman grows worse every day. How many times must I tell her that five o'clock is my hour——'

'It is five minutes to five now, father, and I hear Mary on the stairs.'

The maid came in with the tea, and set it down with a crash upon the rickety mahogany table, which was one of the chief ornaments of that shabby room. Outside, upon the landing of the mansions, a poor clerk, very wet and tired

as he mounted the many steps to his garret far above, paused a moment to peep into the room and to behold for the first time the face of her whose voice he had heard so often in his hours of loneliness. He saw her as she stood wearily by the piano, and he thought that her beauty surpassed even the portrait of her which sleep had painted for him.

Féo poured out the tea quickly, as though impatient of her task. She was grown old in knowledge of her father's whims, of his selfishness which was linked to fitful generosity, of his platitudes concerning her art, of his unfailing and oft-discovered maladies. The stuffy little flat suffocated her. Ambition, she knew not of what if it were not of memory, carried her mind perpetually to distant scenes—scenes of hill and valley and mountain-land, to quiet cities, to the woods whose very flowers she had forgotten. The jargon of the theatre dinned in her ears as a dirge unendurable. London was a prison to her. She would never escape from this bondage of poverty, of shallowness, of success withheld and hope unrealised. Sometimes she told herself, laughingly, that a tragedy of life would be the best gift she could ask of Destiny. She rebelled ever against monotony—and, rebelling, was the greater slave.

Old Georges de Berthier drank his tea sup by sup with his spoon, and when he had pushed the cup from him, he lighted a Russian cigarette and began to talk about the evening to come. Seated there, deep in a low arm-chair, with the reddening sunlight striking upon his long grey hair, and his spectacles set high upon his little, upturned nose, he looked for all the world like some lilliputian ogre come to play the rôle of beast to the graceful girl, who stood at the piano listening to his theories, as she had listened a thousand times before that day, and must listen again until the finger of her Fate should point some better way or terminate the audience for ever.

'I'm glad they're playing *The Huguenots*, Féo. We're Huguenots ourselves, you know. Some day, when you begin to understand how to use that voice of yours, we'll go to Mornay and see the old castle where the Count lived. That won't be long, if you play your cards well. Never forget that one of your great-grandfathers was Eugene of Mornay. I could call myself Count to-morrow if I chose. People here would laugh. They always do at broken-down gentlemen.'

A shadow of pity passed over the girl's face.

'They do not laugh at the broken-down gentleman until he asks them to, father. I shouldn't care to go to Mornay. It would be like opening a

purse which once held the money you have spent. After all, we can get on very well as we are. People wouldn't think more of you if you were a Count. There are too many about nowadays.'

'There are too many of all sorts, my child. Look at the opera. A voice like yours would have spelt a fortune twenty years ago. To-day it means a ten-line part and five pounds a week. Unless you can make yourself famous by bawling Wagner so loud that people cannot hear the trumpets, you may as well go and sew dresses! For myself, I hate the name of Wagner. A poor, pitiful, resourceless, spiteful, brass-headed adventurer! The world has gone mad. Some day it will wake up and remember the others—Mozart, Bellini, Donizetti—Bizet. Ah, my poor Bizet, that they should forget you!'

Féo was accustomed to the outburst. She ignored it, and began to turn over the pages of *The Huguenots*. Anon, she sang in a rich, low voice which flooded the room and the house with a sweet chord of music, harmonious lingering, divine to one who listened as the poor clerk in his garret above. Never had such a voice been heard in that house. All the romantic temperament, cloaked by the veil of poverty, all the craving for the scenes and faces of her dreams, seemed to be spoken in her song. The music

transformed her. She lived in another world, a world of courts and palaces and mighty rooms, a world of princes and of nobles. When she ceased, she sat for some moments with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes and bosom heaving. She did not see the shabby room, the gathering twilight, the little eyes of the selfish old man. A voice spoke to her, though no other heard the voice. It was the voice of the man she had loved ; and he had forgotten her, she said.

Old Georges de Berthier nodded his head to the music, and then took up his evening paper. 'That is melody,' he said decisively ; 'what we get in our theatres is a part for the trombone. Continue to sing like that, and your five pounds a week will become two hundred. There are no voices nowadays. This man Wagner has ruined them all. When Donizetti wrote, people who could not sing were ashamed to show their faces over the footlights. They brazen it out to-day, and if they are louder than the trumpets, the world says *bis*. You have the old qualities. I wish I could come and hear you to-night, but it is raining, and you know that I never go out when it is raining. Perhaps you had better take a cab. We cannot afford it, but it is necessary that I should make sacrifices until the good day comes. I will dine at eight o'clock.'

Féo scarcely heard him. His strange economies, cheek by jowl with his reckless generosity to those who had no claim upon him, were so much a part of her daily life that she had ceased to think about them. Nor would she remember that the five pounds a week, which must suffice for his luxuries and her necessity, were her own earnings, the reward of days and nights of ceaseless toil, of wanderings in many lands, of privation often, of hope deferred until the heart wearied and the spirit failed. All his fine promises fell upon ears which the monotony of talent unrecognised had closed to the whispers of ambition. She did not believe that the future could be other than the past had been. She could not contemplate a gift even of her womanhood. The romance of her life was done with. She had left it in Vienna, in the gardens of the Prater there; it remained a sweet memory of stolen hours when her lover had gone with her to the wooded hills of the Danube and together they had lived the love dream which never might be aught but a dream. For the rest, she must work and be silent in this gloomy city. It might have been different—but the 'might have been' she refused to deceive herself with.

Half-past seven o'clock was striking when the maid brought a cab to the door, and Féo put on

her cloak to go to the opera. Her father was still reading his paper, and when she stooped to kiss him, he had an item of news for her, which he told with relish, as one who had guessed her story.

'You remember that fellow Jerome—the Prince of Maros—who used to come every day when we were in the Steinstrasse at Vienna! Well, he's in Paris, they say. I shouldn't wonder if he comes to London. But, of course, he won't call on us. These people never do unless it suits them, and you took care that it shouldn't suit. There—I don't complain. No good could have come of it. You were quite right, though some would say you were wrong.'

He tossed the paper to her, and she took it up with trembling fingers. There was so little light in the room that he could not see the flush upon her cheek nor the tears gathering in her eyes. And, unconscious of all that the name meant to her, he continued brutally—

'A clever woman would have married him. It would not have been recognised,—but what does recognition matter if you have a fine house to live in and good clothes for your back? There are twenty princesmorganatically married in Europe to-day. You might have added one to the number—if you had wished. I do not com-

plain of your decision. I never complain. I am always ready to make sacrifices for my child. She knows that, and will remember it.'

Féo put the paper down and drew her hood about her face. The old man's words seemed so many insults cast in her face. She scarce knew what she was doing. Jerome coming to Paris, perhaps to London! If he should remember! If he should still speak to her as he had spoken on those sunny days when the waters of the Danube lapped at their feet and the woods were ripe and green with the first glory of summer! She dared not think of it. She hurried from the house, lest her father should add to the burden she must bear. The sweet breeze following upon the rain filled her as with an ecstasy of her youth. They said in the theatre that she had never sung as she sang that night.

The poor clerk, tossing on his bed in the garret long after the bells of the city had chimed the hour of midnight, beheld a figure of his dreams there, and heard music in the May breeze.

'It is Féo—Féo the singer,' he said.

CHAPTER II

A CUIRASSIER OF THE GUARD

OLD Georges de Berthier dined alone, lingering over his bottle of red wine and complaining of the lot which gave him but two dishes. He had made many sacrifices for his daughter, he thought, and she had been a disappointment to him. It was not that she shirked her work or spared herself pains in the pursuit of her art ; there was none more diligent, few more capable. That which troubled him was her want of interest, the sombre key of her life, her mechanical obedience. She would not make friends even in London. He recalled the names of the many who wished for friendship with her ; above all, the name of young Leslie Drummond, who dogged her steps daily and would have given half his fortune for a single word of encouragement, which never yet was spoken. There was no woman in London who would not be honoured by such a preference ; but Féo ignored the boy, scarce noticed him,

considered his kindness an annoyance. What could one hope, the old man asked, from such a view of life as that? He remembered the day when her girlish *naïveté* had promised success beyond the measure of his hopes. The life, the spirit, the charm of her singing and acting, had been the inducement for him to leave Vienna and to tempt fate in the greater world of London. It was an irony past endurance that his child should lose these powers of her youth so soon as she had quitted Austria. No longer could he pose as the tutor of one who added the merits of a superb spirit to a voice which compelled recognition. She had become a woman. A month had aged her beyond belief. *Impresarios* shook their heads and said, 'She is clever, but she is not gay, my friend; she must learn how to act.' He remembered the days in Vienna, and the very remembrance enraged him.

He dined alone, sipping his wine with satisfaction and pondering upon the problem which was now his daily trouble. After all, five pounds a week were not to be despised. Féo would do better by and by, and they would go to Paris. He remembered that the clever poor man may dine almost as well as the ignorant rich in that city of gastronomic cunning. To the happiness of his daughter he gave no thought. Women

were incomprehensible creatures. Ask them to laugh, and they will cry for the mere pleasure of disappointing you. Féo was sulking now—throwing herself away, committing artistic suicide. He would say nothing about it. He would flatter, cajole her. She would weary of the *rôle*, and the old days would come back again.

Thus he argued, sitting in his great chair with the evening papers in his lap and the red wine at his elbow. He had few friends in London, nor did he seek friends. Men about the house were a danger he would not invite at this stage. Success must first be won; the subtler combat would come later. Féo, after all, was a woman. It would be a disaster if she should discover her womanhood now when she was but an obscurity—a maid-of-all-work, so to speak, at Covent Garden. Such a disaster might send him, Georges de Berthier, begging for his very bread. He shut his snuff-box with a snap, when he thought of such a possibility. Life was very cruel to old men, he thought.

There was little news in the paper, and such as it was it had no interest for him. He cared nothing for politics; he had failed in his own art as a pianist, and to read of other men's success enraged him. Somehow, he knew not why, he found himself turning again and again to that

page of social gossip wherein the movements of Prince Jerome of Maros were told in a brief paragraph concerning Vienna and the Austrian Court. Féo had met the Prince at the opera-house in Vienna in the winter of the previous year. He was then a young man of twenty-two, the second son of the Archduke Frederick, accounted by the women the handsomest man in Vienna, a soldier of strangely romantic and ardent temperament, an officer of the Cuirassiers of the Guard, and a great favourite with the old Emperor. Music had ever been a passion with him, and music took him often to the opera and to Richter's house. There he had first seen Féo, and almost from the moment of his presentation he had taken no pains to conceal his infatuation. So quickly did the attachment ripen that many shook their heads and feared a scandal. The more malicious tongues openly proclaimed the evil they desired. It was said in the purlieus of the Court that the Prince was young and reckless enough to stake even his inheritance and his future for the sake of a woman's face. News of the affair came at last even to the Archduke, who dealt with the matter summarily, and would hear neither argument nor protest. Prince Jerome was sent upon a mission to Croatia. The directors of the opera were advised that it

was impolitic any longer to avail themselves of Mademoiselle Féo's services. Georges de Berthier received a strong hint that his daughter would do better in Paris. He accepted the inevitable, and quitted Vienna. Yet he had never ceased to regret that step. 'She might have married him if she had been a clever woman,' he argued. Deep down in his heart he may have contemplated other possibilities. The borderland between selfishness and crime is often but ill defined. He remembered that Jerome was a cousin of the Hapsburgs—royal sins are written often in invisible ink; the world does not ask that kings and princes shall read the commandments *au pied de la lettre*. His daughter would have been very rich, at least. She would have brought content to his own life.

He brooded upon these things as he puffed at an old briar pipe and read the paragraph from the first line again. When Mary came in at ten o'clock to announce a visitor, he did not hear her, and she repeated her message twice before he put the paper down. Few came to see one whom the world had long forgotten. He anticipated some message from the theatre. Féo was ill—in just such a cruelty as that would his destiny delight.

'Who is it—who wants me? Where has the

person come from? You know that I see nobody—at this time.'

The girl began to stammer her explanations; but she had made nothing of them when the stranger, whoever he was, stood suddenly in the doorway, and bowed with great deference to the astonished Berthier.

'You are Mr. Georges de Berthier,' he said in English which betrayed but a charm of accent; 'I am Captain Otto Lamberg, and I have come from Vienna to see you.'

Berthier, amazed beyond expression, put on his glasses with *maladroit* fingers and stared awkwardly at his guest. He beheld a man whose dress was perfect, whose age apparently could not be less than thirty-five nor more than forty years, whose forehead was slightly bald, who wore an eyeglass, and carried a cane with a gold and amber head. A soldier self-confessed, this man, he said, was accustomed to be at his ease wherever and with whomsoever he might find himself. And he came from Vienna! A hundred hopes of his visit sent the blood tingling through the old man's veins.

'Captain Lamberg,' he stammered nervously, 'will you please to take a chair? My daughter is at the opera. We are quite alone. I must apologise for this poor room. Art has strange homes.'

The Austrian pooh-poohed him with an airy gesture.

'Your name, sir, is honoured wherever men worthy to honour it are found. I shall not soon forget this visit to your house.'

He set his hat upon the floor and drew a chair to the table. Berthier, suspicious already because of the compliment, did not fail to notice that his guest wore the ribbon of an Austrian order in his buttonhole, and that an opal pin of great beauty was half concealed by his black silk scarf. The man, in his turn, was telling himself that the compliment was a mistake, and that he must go to work another way.

'It is my privilege to be here,' he went on very affably; 'but you do not wish to waste your time in listening to compliments which may be well spoken or may be the vanities of a stranger. I trust that we shall be good friends. You, at least, will not easily imagine the reason of my visit?'

Berthier, who continued to stand by the fireplace, answered a little curtly—

'I am entirely unable to imagine it, Captain Lamberg.'

'As, naturally, you would be, since I come from one whose name you must have forgotten, and whose object in sending me you would never guess.'

'You speak, then, of a stranger?'

'I speak of Prince Jerome.'

He did not look at the old man when he uttered the name, but cast his eyes down upon the paper and fidgeted with the yellow gloves in his hand. Berthier, in his turn, betrayed no surprise whatever. The thousand hopes and chances which such a name could suggest to his imagination did not move him even to a gesture of the hand.

'I remember Prince Jerome well. He did me the honour to recognise my daughter's talent while we were in Vienna. His kindness drove us from the city. I cannot imagine what message he can wish to send us.'

The answer was immediate and frank.

'The message which I bring to you is not difficult to understand, Mr. Berthier. You have read the evening papers, I see, and I cannot suppose that you have overlooked that which concerns us most nearly—the Prince's intended visit to Paris.'

Berthier took up the *Gazette*, and pointed to the paragraph.

'The paper says that he is in Paris now—you say that he intends to go there; what am I to believe?'

The Austrian bit his lip. He had not reckoned upon such an encounter.

'Let us understand each other better,' he said quickly; 'I am of the household of the Archduke Frederick. Admit, at least, that my information is better than that of a society gossip in London?'

He waited shrewdly for his answer, while Berthier, breathing heavily, regarded him closely through his glasses.

'You come, then, from the Archduke Frederick. It was the Archduke who compelled the directors of the opera to terminate my daughter's engagement. It was the Archduke who shut the doors of many houses to us, and sent us, paupers, to London again. I am curious to know what message he can send to me.'

'He sends none. He does not know why I am in London.'

'And the reason, Captain—the reason of his ignorance?'

'My friendship for his son.'

'Which prompts you to forget the debt you owe to the father.'

'Certainly, if there were a debt; but there is none. I am the aide-de-camp to the Archduke, it is true; but the position is an illustration of the excellent advantages of a vicious education. My father lost his fortune in an attempt to improve the breed of Hungarian horses by the

importation of English thoroughbreds into Austria. The Archduke Frederick, unable to profit by his example, is now engaged upon a similar enterprise. As one who knows all that is to be known about the rascality of our racecourse, I am invaluable to him. But that does not make me less the friend of his son, who is a brother officer, and one of the truest gentlemen in Vienna—as you will presently discover.’

He spoke as one who desired to tell the whole of his story without fear or concealment. Berthier heard him to the end, and when he had stood a little while debating it, his manner changed and became one almost of servility.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘we shall understand each other very well by and by, Captain. And I am very rude and inhospitable. Pray let me offer you a cigar and a glass of wine.’

He found the cigar, a very dry and old one, in the bottom of the china pot upon the mantelshelf. The stranger smoked it with the air of fine enjoyment, though inwardly he cursed the occasion and the giver.

‘Tobacco is one of my vices,’ he said affably; ‘I am what Bismarck called a ring-smoker. When you are at my house in Paris, I will give you one of the cigars that the Emperor always smokes.’

'A safe promise, since I am as likely to go to your house in Paris as to Japan.'

'As you shall please when you have heard me. Possibly the decision will rest with your daughter. She is, after all, the one to say. The Prince would advance no word that might persuade her against her will.'

Berthier set down the decanter quickly.

'Let us come to the point, Captain,' he exclaimed; 'what is the proposition you wish to make to me?'

Captain Lamberg took the cigar from his mouth, and answered quietly—

'The simplest proposition in the world—that you and Miss de Berthier come to my house in the Avenue Marceau at Paris as my guests during the month that the Prince of Maros is in the city.'

Berthier's heart beat fast, but some moments passed before he spoke again.

'The Prince desires, then, to meet my daughter again?'

'It is his daily desire.'

'He knows that I can only receive him as a man of honour?'

'He is perfectly aware of it.'

'Are there any conditions attached to your invitation?'

'The most trifling.'

'Ha! I thought there would be conditions. Be good enough to name them, Captain.'

'That you permit no one, not even your most intimate friend, to know of this visit.'

'Are you ashamed of my daughter's acquaintance?'

'I am not ashamed, I am prudent. A whisper of this in Vienna—and, must we imagine the consequences?'

'There is no need, Captain. When do you wish us to leave England?'

'By the mail to-morrow night—if your daughter's engagements permit.'

'They shall permit. I will make it my business to see the director in the morning. Meanwhile, I remember that we are strangers. You may be the person you pretend to be; you may be an adventurer. As one who has seen much of the world, I make no apology in asking for your credentials. You have letters, papers—something to substantiate this story.'

Captain Lamberg took a case from his pocket and began to twist the rubber band of it. A curious smile hovered upon his face.

'Do you generally ask for papers from those whose houses you are about to visit, Mr. Berthier?'

'I visit no houses under circumstances such as these.'

‘Then I must make the experience a pleasant one. Here is a letter from Prince Jerome—there is my passport; add it to my commission in the Cuirassiers of the Guard, and my permission that you go to-morrow to the Austrian Embassy and ask what they know of me, and that is all I can do for you.’

He tossed the papers on the table, and watched the old man’s trembling fingers as they held the documents to the light. When five minutes had passed, Berthier put the papers down and held out his hand.

‘I will go to Paris with you,’ he said

CHAPTER III

THE INTRIGUE

CAPTAIN LAMBERG quitted the house as the clocks were striking a quarter to twelve. He lit a new cigar at the foot of the stairs, and the light of his match betrayed a face which spoke of much satisfaction. He knew that he had played for a great stake, and he was sure that he had won.

'A very, very simple affair,' was his thought as he stood irresolute a moment upon the pavement before the mansions. 'These old men are always the best to deal with. They think they are clever, and you know exactly what questions they will ask. To-morrow we shall hear what the daughter has to say.'

The reflection pleased him, and he was about to walk on, when a cab stopped at the kerb, and Féo, with the exciting strains of Meyerbeer still in her ears, jumped lightly to the pavement and began to search for her purse. A lamp marked the place, and the merry wind played with her

white cloak and with her pretty hair, and showed the graceful outline of her figure. She was not aware that a man watched her as she stood, and she passed into the house unconscious of his presence; but he, amazed at the apparition, continued to gaze after her for many minutes, forgetful of time and place, and the success he had so lately won.

‘Good God!’ he exclaimed, in a burst of very real astonishment, ‘that can’t be the woman!’

The doubt perplexed him. For a moment he entertained the idea of returning to Berthier’s apartment and finding some excuse as he went; but the hazard of the proceeding was not to be hidden from him; and when he had reflected a little while, he abandoned the project, and turned instead to the cabstand on the opposite side of the way.

‘The Savoy Hotel—a shilling more if you go fast.’

It was half-past twelve when he entered the hotel, the hour of the exodus from the restaurant; but he nodded only to such amongst the chattering throngs as he knew, and went straight to his private apartments on the second floor. Thither he summoned a waiter, and having ordered whisky and some cigars, he asked for one who had awaited his return with impatience.

'Is Count Horowitz in the hotel?'

'I will see, sir.'

'Let him know that I have returned. If he wishes it, I will come to his room.'

Count Horowitz was a white-haired diplomatist of sixty in the service of the Austrian Embassy in London. He came at once when the message was delivered, and the greeting between the two betrayed their mutual interests. They spoke rapidly and in low tones. A rare burst of laughter implied that the affair they discussed could sometimes amuse them.

'I had no idea that things would go so well,' said the Count, as he lighted a cigar and settled himself in an arm-chair. 'Any other would have made a mess of it. The father is the enemy. If he had remained in London while the boy was here, it is impossible to say what would have happened.'

'That is a large compliment to an adventuress, is it not?'

'If you like. I am not concerned with her. The main point is that they are going. You know the Prince as well as I do. He has forgotten the woman's name by this time. He would remember it again—take seven new devils into his house, so to speak—if he saw her here in London. And, of course, he

would see her. The royal box is at his disposal. He would see her two or three times a week.'

He uttered the words as though they implied the greatest misfortune which could overtake him. An old servant of the Emperor, a noble in a country where nobility remains what it was two centuries ago, this madness of Prince Jerome's, the Emperor's cousin, was a subject he could not discuss with patience. Captain Lamberg, on the other hand, did not permit the emotions to trouble him at all. He had come to London to serve the interests of one who would know how to pay him for the service. To him personally it did not matter a straw if the Archduke's son married all the singers in the city.

'You take it very earnestly, Count,' he said, helping himself from the decanter and passing it; 'for myself I regard the matter as already settled. These people will go to Paris to-morrow. I shall put them off with excuses until the Prince has returned to Vienna. The old man will ultimately accept the Archduke's offer, and that will be the end of it. There is only one point. The story which keeps them to Paris must be well told and plausible. If they go out into the streets, they will read the papers, and reading the papers will spell the first train back to Calais.

That would be a disaster! I do not think it will come about.'

'You will take every precaution possible to see that it does not. There are our people at the Embassy. If you need special help, the police will assist you. Any measures are to be justified in dealing with a woman of this kind. Be certain of one thing—we shall not call you to account if the measures are severe. The gratitude of the family will be in proportion to your success. If you want money, it is here for you to any reasonable amount. As far as I can gather, the girl has no friends in London except a young man who has just left the University of Cambridge, and who is not likely to make many inquiries after her. His name is Leslie Drummond. Remember it if there be the occasion. I shall expect a letter every day while the Prince is here.'

'Your wishes are my orders. I have had experience in the work, as I need not tell you. This is not quite the same thing, if I am to judge by the woman's face. She passed into the house as I came out. I should have said she was a lady. Certainly, she is a very pretty woman.'

'She must be that. Those who knew her in Vienna speak of her flatteringly. That she is an adventuress of an uncommon kind I readily

admit. You will need all your talent. I shall be very glad to hear that you have left London.'

'You will hear it to-morrow night at eight o'clock.'

His manner showed that he had no doubt of it. When, by and by, the Count left him, he turned to his bed as though the day's work had been no more adventurous than a day in his quarters at Vienna. After all, these secret missions, involving as they did the closest confidence, were in themselves a compliment. He, Otto Lamberg, had been sent upon many of them during his strange career. One more need provoke neither scruple nor hesitation. He was about to save a reckless young man from an adventuress. If ever duplicity were to be justified, it was in such a case. Moreover, he was not the man who cared a snap of the finger for justification.

And so he slept upon it, while Féo in her room dreamed of the blue waters of the Danube, and of the days of sunshine which once had taught her the joy of life and the meaning of her youth.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAIL TO PARIS

THEY were ringing the warning bell for the Paris mail at five minutes to eight on the evening following upon Otto Lamberg's visit to Berthier's flat, when a young man, whose height caused remark even in such a place, shouldered his way to the barrier of the main-line platform at Charing Cross, and asked the ticket-inspector to admit him.

'I want to say good-bye to some one,' he exclaimed bluntly; 'can't you do it for me?'

The inspector smiled.

'If it's a lady, I don't doubt I could do it, sir; but it's against the rules.'

'The rules be hanged!—here's five shillings for you. Perjure your immortal soul and let me through.'

The inspector pocketed the money, sternly rebuked a poor old woman who desired to see her son into the train, and resumed his normal occupation of clipping tickets. The young man, meanwhile, marched quickly up the platform and

began to peer into the carriages—particularly the second-class carriages—in search of one whose departure from London had mystified him beyond hope of understanding.

‘She couldn’t go first—I don’t believe they have the cash. The old boy must have taken some mad idea into his head. She’d never go without wishing me good-bye—and she didn’t say a word about it yesterday. I wonder what the deuce is up.’

Such an argument he repeated while the search carried him almost to the engine of the train, and discovery seemed as far off as ever. When he came at last upon a reserved first-class compartment and saw Féo herself standing at the window, it was difficult to say who was the more surprised: the girl at such an encounter, or the man at finding her about to travel under such circumstances.

‘Well,’ he said laconically, for mere compliments or set phrases were always beyond him, ‘so I’ve run you to earth. It was a near thing, though—the man at the gate wouldn’t let me through.’

She gave him her hand, and he held it in an iron grip. She was alone in the carriage, and the light striking down upon her pale face added to its beauties.

'We are going to Paris for a little while, my father and I. He is over there at the book-stall. He will be very surprised to see you, Mr. Drummond.'

'Oh, but I didn't come to see him, Féo—I came to see you. You know that well enough. And you were going off without saying good-bye to me.'

'There was no time. Our visit was only arranged to-day. I don't quite know now why we are going. I'm sure I don't know when we are coming back.'

Leslie Drummond pulled his moustache viciously.

'It's a d——d mystery altogether, then—I beg your pardon, Féo—you must know what I think about it. Look here! where are you going to stop?'

She reflected a moment, and then spoke rapidly as though wishing to anticipate the return of the others.

'We are stopping with a friend of my father's, Captain Otto Lamberg, in the Avenue Marceau; I fear it is a silly visit altogether. Perhaps, if you are in Paris, you will come and see me. I might be glad of friends there.'

She laid a little emphasis upon her words, and slight as it was he detected a certain apprehension

prompting her confession. When he looked up quickly, her eyes were regarding him a little pitifully, he thought.

'You don't mean to say you're going against your will?'

'I have not been consulted in the matter. My father must think that the business is important, for he has wished me to break my engagement at the opera. Captain Lamberg is an Austrian. He comes from Vienna. I have only seen him for five minutes, but I do not like him. A woman's first judgment upon a man is rarely wrong.'

A cloud passed over the boy's face. He knew Féo's story. 'We will be comrades, we never can be anything else,' she had once said to him. From that moment everything that came out of Austria was hateful to him.

'It's that fellow over in Vienna again, Féo. You'll never forget him, though he'll forget you quick enough when it suits him. I shall cross to Paris on Monday and look you up. These foreign beggars aren't to be trusted anyway. I wonder what you can see in him.'

'We must not speak of that,' she said, 'and—here is my father, Mr. Drummond.'

Old Georges de Berthier, with the Austrian at his side, came up to the carriage at the moment.

The captain had an armful of books in his hand, but no newspapers. Berthier himself carried a copy of the *Figaro* and of a magazine. Both men gave anything but a cordial welcome to the companion whom Féo had found.

'Ah, is that you, Mr. Drummond? They told you we were going, then?'

'I heard from Mary, your servant. She said she was not to tell any one, but of course I don't count. Rather sudden, isn't it, Mr. Berthier?'

Captain Lamberg hastened to intervene.

'Present me to your friend,' he said.

Berthier introduced them curtly.

'Captain Lamberg — Mr. Leslie Drummond. An athlete, Captain; he has rowed in the boat races here at the University of Cambridge.'

The Austrian, whose eyes were noting every feature of the lad's face, bowed with great ceremony.

'I was once a rower myself,' he exclaimed; 'if you come to Paris, do not forget to visit my house, Mr. Drummond. You are fond of horses; all Englishmen are. I have some very good ones.'

Leslie laughed frankly.

'Be careful, Captain—I am often in Paris, and may take you at your word.'

'Then I shall be quite reckless, Mr. Drummond. It shall only be *auf wiedersehen*. I think they are wishing us to go aboard, as the Americans say.'

Until this time a certain nonchalance characterised his utterances; but, without any perceptible reason, his manner changed suddenly, and he began to move restlessly, urging his companion to enter the train and chatting at hazard with Féo. Leslie, unaware altogether of the importance of his news, remarked upon the arrival of the mail from Paris, which was just drawing up at the other platform.

'It's late to-night—you'll have a bad passage, Féo. Well, *au revoir*. I won't forget.'

The guard waved his lantern; the engine whistled a shrill, dolorous note; the train began to move slowly. For an instant, Captain Lamberg was wondering what was the meaning of the words—'I won't forget.' But as he thought upon them he chanced to look at Féo, and the pallor of her face startled him.

'Miss Berthier,' he exclaimed, 'you are not ill?'

She looked him straight in the face.

'I thought that I saw the Prince of Maros in that other train. I could not make a mistake?'

The two men exchanged a quick glance, but the Austrian answered her.

'You were mistaken,' he said. 'The Prince was

not in that train. He is now on his way to Paris where we are going to meet him.'

From the other platform at the same moment, Prince Jerome of Maros stepped into a carriage which was to take him to Buckingham Palace. He had arrived in London a week before his friends at the Austrian Embassy expected him.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE IN THE AVENUE MARCEAU

FÉO had left London on the last Friday in May, and Drummond awaited a letter from her with some impatience. Boyishly, he was sure that she would write to him, though she had never written before, and he did not even know what her handwriting was like. Six months before that day he had seen her for the first time, when she was touring with the Carl Rosa Company, and visited the Royal Theatre at Cambridge. He had been an undergraduate in his fifth year at Jesus College then—permitted so long a residence because, as the dean said, he really owed it to the college to take some sort of degree. He heard Féo sing in several of the older operas, and once even in *Tannhäuser*, when he envied the lucky tenor who played the leading rôle, and could make a passionate appeal to so pretty a Venus. A little stratagem, and he obtained an introduction to Georges de Berthier; and by the surreptitious aid of many an expensive supper-party, purchased a temporary

place in the old man's affections. But the cunning of the old musician, and the strange reluctance of Féo to accept his friendship, forbade any satisfactory progress. He was not romantic in the common sense. An orphan of age, with a capital in English railway stock representing an income of over three thousand a year, he had not been accustomed to wait for anything that he wished. His impetuosity flattered him with the idea of calling a cab and driving Féo to the nearest registrar. When old Berthier shook his head, and muttered hints about youth, time, patience, and other ridiculous platitudes, Master Leslie swore to himself in honest Anglo-Saxon. He could have understood the poetry of a flight to some Eldorado with Féo in the carriage beside him, but that romance which would put another man in his place was not to be comprehended. 'A woolly-headed foreigner, too!' he once exclaimed to an intimate friend; 'she might as well have told me that it was a black man.'

Féo went away from Cambridge, and her father took advantage of the occasion to flatter himself upon the number of suppers and dinners he had eaten at Leslie's expense. 'These students are all in debt,' he argued wisely; 'the more money they have, the sooner the tailors will put them into prison. This young man says that he has three

thousand pounds a year. He gives three supper-parties a week, and each supper-party costs ten pounds. At that rate the tailors will have him in five years' time. Besides, he is too big and strong. We shall not marry a man who can row a boat. The water does not agree with us !'

His argument was lost upon Féo, who had lived one romance and would not contemplate another. The youth and laughter at Cambridge amused her, reminded her, perchance, of the virginal joy of her own life, as youth and laughter ever must. Leslie Drummond was a good-natured boy. When he followed her from town to town during the Christmas vacation, she told him so ; promising him her friendship, and narrating for him the story which to her was the only story. Never before had she spoken of that secret of hers ; yet, she knew not why, she could tell it to this sympathetic English boy, and find a strange pleasure of memory in the recital. ' If you wish to be my friend, never speak of this again,' she had said. Leslie held his tongue, but pursued her nevertheless—aimlessly, doggedly, ever unresignedly. In angry moments he beheld himself doing heroic deeds, thrashing the man who had robbed him of Féo, insulting him, calling him out to leave his dead body on the ground. At saner intervals, he argued that she would forget and that he could

wait. Her sweet persuasiveness sent him back to Cambridge during that very month of May—and he obtained his degree, to the great astonishment of the dean, who collapsed on receiving the news, and to the anger of his private coach, with whom he had wagered the term's fee that he would pass.

Féo left London with her father and Captain Otto on the Friday. On the following Monday, as no letter came from her, Leslie decided to go to Paris and to ask her why she had not written to him. He crossed the Channel by the morning mail, and went straight to the Hôtel Chatam. When he had dined by himself, he asked the head waiter if he knew the Avenue Marceau, and how far off it was. The man raised his eyes to heaven in mute protest. If he knew the Avenue Marceau! It was one of the *grand* thoroughfares. Every one knew the Avenue Marceau. It was a turning out of the Champs Elysées. Monsieur was evidently a stranger. He had better take a cab, or he would lose himself. Leslie listened unconcernedly, and disregarding the polite offers of the hotel interpreter, called a cab and gave his directions in execrable French. He liked to think that the money his father had spent on French masters was not wasted. The cabman, in his turn, was all politeness. When his fare had shut the door, he bent down and asked the interpreter

'Where to?' The men exchanged a mutual 'Oh yes,' to express contempt for the foreigner and his ways, and the cab drove off.

It is comparatively easy to direct a Paris cabman. It is more difficult to argue with him. When, in the Avenue Marceau, Leslie's coachman stopped suddenly and asked him the number of the house to which he wished to go, the man might as well have started a discussion upon the Talmud. The flourishes of his whip, his astounding gesticulations, his abandon to despair, quickly drew a little crowd to the scene.

'I shall be charged with assault and battery if this goes on,' was Leslie's argument as he listened to the frenzied appeals. 'Why the deuce can't the man speak plain English?'

He searched for a five-franc piece, and offered it humbly in appeasement of the terrible wrath of one who merely sought to know the number of a house. In the crowd there was an old gentleman who spoke 'leetle English,' and he generously attempted to put the matter straight.

'The number of the mansion, monsieur—what is your number?'

'That's just what I want to know,' said the lad desperately. 'He's an Austrian chap, Captain von Something, and I'm jiggered if I haven't forgotten his name.'

The Frenchman shook his head and passed on. 'They are all mad, these English,' he said.

Leslie, who wore a light dust-coat, and had not changed his blue serge after the journey, began to think that the old Frenchman was right. It was just like Féo, he argued, to bring him to Paris on this fool's errand. Why did she not write down the number of the house? He remembered that the Austrian had been ready enough with his invitations, but had quite forgotten to supplement them with those directions which were necessary to bring a guest to his doors. The Avenue Marceau was, certainly, the devil of a street. He looked ahead to see a bewildering maze of lights twinkled away to a horizon so distant that the possibility even of exploring it drove him to despair. And all the houses were so shamelessly alike. By here and there, it is true, he espied some building standing apart in a little garden of trees, as though resenting the intrusion of neighbouring windows, and desiring a seclusion which a later generation of builders had denied to it. But such houses did not help him. Impossible to ring at all the bells of those countless doors and to ask, 'Does Count von Something live here?—an Austrian, you know.' He must wait until he could find some one who would help him without the danger of an apoplectic fit of the argument.

To-morrow he would go to the Austrian Embassy. Meanwhile, there was the Moulin Rouge. He did not care a snap of the fingers about the Moulin Rouge, but he knew that you must go there when you visit Paris. People at home would feel offended if he had not been. He was too young yet to have lost the gregarious instincts of the untravelled Englishman.

He went to the Moulin Rouge, and next day was at the Austrian Embassy. They told him that there were many Austrians in the Avenue Marceau, and that his information was somewhat vague. 'The name of the captain, mein Herr—bring us that and we will point out his house to you.' He nodded his head and replied that the name had a 'von' to it, but he feared this striking method of identification would not help them. Three hours spent vainly in the Avenue Marceau that morning convinced him that he had better go back to London and ascertain if Féo had not written after all. He determined to do so, and made up his mind to leave by the evening mail. When the hour for departure came, he remembered that Féo was in Paris. Her presence gave a stimulus to his life there, which was irresistible. He did not heed his loneliness, his lack of friends, his difficulty in passing away the time. Féo was in the city. He was near her. A chance piece

of luck would permit him to hear her voice again.

The luck for which he hoped seemed to come to him when he had been in Paris for ten days. He had spent his morning as usual in the Avenue Marceau, and was returning gloomily to *déjeuner* at a little café in the Faubourg St. Honoré, when whom should he see on the pavement before him but the very Austrian whose house he had searched for so vainly! There was no mistaking that military gait, that eye-glass, that curious yellow hair tinged almost with a vein of auburn as the sunlight fell upon it. Leslie said that he could have picked the fellow from a thousand. He began to congratulate himself upon his resolution to remain in Paris. He would see Féo after all. Excitement of the hope sent him hurrying after the Austrian. The man was then not fifty yards ahead of his pursuer; he was about to enter an old house, one of those doleful-looking mansions of the Paris of the Empire, which stand back from the world in an *enceinte* of wall and old-world gardens, and are ashamed of the newness all about them. Evidently this was his own house, for he opened the garden gate with a key and passed out of sight before the other could come up with him. When Leslie arrived at the gate, he found it

shut—an old gate that should not have been opened for two generations.

He was out of breath, and he knew that his cheeks were flaming, so he stood a moment upon the pavement, and looked up at the windows of the house above the high wall of the garden. Such rooms as he saw were garrets, he imagined, and unused. The house itself seemed strangely silent. Not a sound came from the garden. The old garden wall was rotting and decayed. When he tugged at the great bell-pull, no answering ring rewarded him. In vain he beat upon the door and pulled at the handle of the bell until the rusty knob came away in his hand. No one appeared at the gate. He heard no footsteps, no voices, not so much as the baying of a watchdog.

An hour passed before he quitted the Avenue Marceau to return to his hotel. He was very preoccupied as he went, and he laughed once at himself for his foolish fancies. Yet, rightly or wrongly, the idea had come to him that Féo was in that house and that she was in danger there. And he made up his mind that he would not leave Paris before he knew the truth, and had heard from her own lips that all was well with her.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNING OF THE DOUBT

GEORGES DE BERTHIER sat in the conservatory of Captain Lamberg's house in the Avenue Marceau and sipped his liqueur and smoked his cigar with the air of one justly rewarded for a long life of idleness. He had been in Paris for nearly twenty days, and he said to himself that if such luxuries continued to wait upon his pleasure, he would cheerfully consent to any extension of hospitality that might be pleasing to his host. Whatever misgivings had attended his departure from London, no misgiving troubled him in that splendid house. Wretched as the purlieus were, rotting and decayed the garden, gloomy and forbidding the windows, its interior, nevertheless, was unsurpassed by any mansion in the quarter.

Many thoughts were in his mind on that twentieth day when he sat in the conservatory of the house and drank good coffee and remembered the excellent *déjeuner* of which he had

just partaken. Sometimes, it is true, he was troubled at the continued absence of the man who had brought him to Paris, but who remained, strangely enough, in that England he had just left. This fact his host did not seek to deny.

'Mademoiselle Féo was right and we were wrong,' Lamberg said: 'the Prince arrived in London on the night we left. It was a summons from her Majesty, the Queen of England. He has gone to Windsor, and will go afterwards to your island of Wight. I am sorry that you must wait, but what can I do? If we left now, to-day, for London again, his Highness would be here while we were crossing the sea. It is annoying, but it cannot be helped, M. Berthier.'

He spoke as a man who wished to be their friend, with a rare courtesy and an unfailing regard for their pleasure. When he impressed upon them the hope that they would not be seen in the streets of Paris, it was as the desire of one who served them in all honesty. Sometimes he would appear to forget that desire, and would urge an evening's amusement at one of the cafés in the Champs Elysées, or even an excursion to Saint-Cloud or Versailles. They did not know that, on such days, he had read the French and English papers from the first line to the last, and had set the occasion down as a

safe one. The simplicity of his task amazed him. In another ten days Prince Jerome would be in Vienna again ; all the world would know of his betrothal to his cousin Princess Marie. There would be an angry scene then—but a bribe of money to the old man would end that ; and as for the girl—well, she was young, she was pretty, she was clever : such women do not lack careers. Lamberg was attracted by Féo in spite of himself, but her reticence and her silence mystified him. She had seemed to be in a dream ever since they quitted London.

‘Your daughter does not like me,’ he said to Berthier on that twentieth day ; ‘she has not liked me since she saw the Prince in London. If you are not very careful with her, you will send our friend back to Vienna, and it will be a long time before he comes to Paris again. I have been foolish, perhaps, to take her out at all. There are sure to be those who know her at the Embassy here, and if they have seen us—well, the rest is easy to guess. At the same time I cannot tell your daughter these things. She is an Englishwoman, and would resent the necessity for so much secrecy. I do not blame her for that. I only suggest that you should do what I cannot do.’

Old Berthier, thoroughly alarmed, and seeing

in his imagination the good things about him vanish as at a magic touch, hastened to express contrition for Féo and apologies for her waywardness.

'She shall not go out any more,' he protested; 'it will be difficult to explain, but I am not frightened at that. Ah, my friend, you do not know what it is to have a daughter!'

'Since I am a bachelor of twenty years' standing, I do not; but I can understand. I know something of women, and I rarely complain of them. After all, the fact that they don't do just what we want them to do does not necessarily imply that we are right and they are wrong. A woman's intuition is, in my opinion, worth more than a man's philosophy. Mademoiselle does not like me because she does not altogether trust me. I shall win her trust by and by, and she will forgive me. Meanwhile, the less she knows of what is going on here the better. It is always difficult to teach diplomacy to a lady. If you ask your daughter to be prudent for my sake, she will go out five minutes afterwards. On the contrary, suggest that a little sacrifice would be of service to the Prince, and the end is gained.'

Berthier sipped his maraschino and smoked for a little while in silence.

'There shall be no difficulties of our making,'

he exclaimed at last with obvious reluctance. 'I wish I could say that there would be none made by others. My child has lost her engagement at the opera, and they will not offer it to her a second time. Her future is dear to me. I should be glad to think that we are not pursuing a chimera.'

Captain Lamberg lit a cigar and drew his chair a little closer.

'I thought that you would speak of this matter sooner or later,' he said frankly. 'I am glad that it should be now. Of course, I do not disguise it from myself that something might intervene even yet between the Prince and his wishes. If he cannot see mademoiselle in Paris, it will be open to you either to await a more fortunate opportunity, or to stipulate that those who are keeping you apart shall pay for the privilege. In your shoes those would be my alternatives.'

He spoke with apparent carelessness, but was understood nevertheless. Old Berthier lent a ready ear to a suggestion which pleased him so well.

'Come,' he said, a little querulously, 'let us be quite plain with each other. Yesterday you told me a fairy-tale; you now wish to tell me the truth. You have other interests.'

The Austrian dissented sharply.

'Not at all. You go too fast. I speak neither as a friend nor as a foe, but as a man of the world. When I went to London, three weeks ago, I believed it quite possible to bring these young people together again. If they are kept apart, it will be by an influence I am unable to combat. I do not wish to see you suffer by my failure, and so I remind you that there are those in Vienna who will be very ready to hear your complaints. I should regret such an eventuality chiefly for the sake of the man who would give half the years of his life to meet your daughter again and to know that his future was her future. None the less, if the worst should happen, there is always the other course of which I speak. In your shoes, I would accept, unhesitatingly, any satisfaction they may make, as a just debt owing to you by those who sent you out of Austria.'

'You think that I should write to the Archduke?'

'If the circumstances justify a letter. This week will be decisive. Should the Prince not be in Paris on Sunday morning, he will never be, so far as we are concerned. It will mean that they have become acquainted with certain matters we endeavoured to keep from their knowledge. I say this frankly because you have trusted me, and I desire that the trust shall be mutual. Whatever

happens here, Otto Lamberg will always remain the friend of Georges de Berthier and of his daughter.'

He protested with that fine show of manners by which the Austrians are ever to be known; and so subtly did he complicate the problem that the many issues of it were not yet to be mastered by his victim. Berthier, on his part, began to rack his brains anew in a confused attempt to grapple with the fresh situation which candour had made possible. He was still silent in such an employment when Féo, dressed for walking, passed down the stairs and stood at the conservatory door.

'I am going to the Bois, father,' she said, pausing an instant to speak to them; 'if you are coming, you will find me at the *chalet*.'

Both men rose to their feet, but Lamberg was the first to speak.

'Is that very prudent, Mademoiselle Féo?' he asked.

'I am tired of prudence, and I am going out,' she answered quietly.

'You are very foolish, Féo,' Berthier said. 'You know perfectly well that we do not wish any one to see us in Paris. A little sacrifice is necessary, and yet you do not consent to it.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'The Prince would not wish me to suffocate,' she exclaimed. 'I am going to the Bois. If you are frightened, you can get a carriage and come and fetch me.'

She turned quickly and ran down the stairs. The *concierge*, a burly Austrian, hesitated a moment before he opened the door; but Lamberg had followed her, and he indicated assent by the slightest nod of his head. Despite his words to her father, he had marked the day a safe one.

'If I had thought of it, we would have driven you,' he said, standing at the door to let her pass, 'but we shall come for you at the *chalet*.'

'How kind you are!' was her answer, 'and how grateful my father should be!'

The irony was not lost upon him. He watched her as she began to walk quickly towards the Arc de l'Étoile, and he knew that with her the battle lay.

'Ten thousand florins will buy the father,' he said to himself as he went upstairs again, 'but there is no fortune in Europe which will keep a woman away from the man she loves.'

CHAPTER VII

WESTWARD TO THE BOIS

IT was a day of June, sunny and fresh with gentle breezes. All Paris moved westward to the Bois when Féo quitted the old house in the Avenue Marceau, and found herself hurrying onward to that scene of life and colour and merriment which the city ever can command. Still ripe with the greens of spring, the rustling trees in the avenues about the Arc de l'Étoile seemed to shake down their blossoms upon an endless procession, wherein every known form of carriage that man has made could find its place and contribute to the cavalcade. Splendid barouches, low-built victorias drawn by perfect cobs, dog-carts with two horses, dog-carts with one, coaches, cabs, even the terrible fiacre plunging into the *mêlée*—all these rolled and surged towards the great rendezvous whither Paris betook herself at the appointed hour ; there to plan the morrow, to see and to be seen, perchance to find lovers waiting, to be gay

always, wearing the smiling face and the jesting tongue because the days of summer are few and only *la jeunesse* is eternal.

Féo watched the carriages as she trod the crowded pavements, and many desires and ambitions were born to her of the scene. That dolour of life, which had pursued her since she left Vienna, was no part of her nature, she knew. It was her birthright to laugh as these people laughed, to wear the smiles they wore, to love as they loved. Her very silence and gloom had been the outcome of that suppressed excitement which the tragedy of love had born within her. She knew that a word from one man could break the spell and bring back the Féo whose gaiety and girlish energy had won so great a name in the theatres of Vienna. In imagination she beheld herself, dressed as the throng of chattering women whose hats and whose gowns were to be discussed, ay in many a village, during the coming year. She saw herself, with Jerome at her side, the envy of many who then passed so close to the pavement that she could have touched them with her hand, but who did not turn a head to look at her. Even in the darkest moments of her life she had believed that fate ultimately would reward her for the hours of work and of poverty and of tears. The same belief was magnified in

this city of hope abundant. Paris was powerful to inspire her to ambition anew. She said to herself, as the throngs jostled her and the men stared at her and the noise of the laughter rang in her ears, 'If—if Jerome should come!'

It was a great desire, a young girl's desire for the consummation of that first great romance of life, surpassing other romances, the love which neither questions nor reckons. From the moment that they had told her their secret in the train, she had lived in another world. Jerome, her lover, was coming to Paris; he had not forgotten her; the old days in Vienna were to be relived again. She wondered neither at the way of their meeting nor at her journey. That which she had suffered in Austria at the hands of the Prince's friends was to be atoned for in this luxury of the old house in the Avenue Marceau. Jerome was very rich. She regarded Lamberg as his servant. He had wished to redeem his promises made long ago in the sunny woods of the Danube. There was no thought of hurt to him in the contemplation of this happiness beyond measure, for she said that he loved her, and she believed that the riches of her love would be dearer to him than anything life could give him.

During the first week of her sojourn in Paris, she had lived in this atmosphere of confidence

unquestioning. The courteous manner of Captain Lamberg, added to her own great wish, forbade suspicion or doubt. Every day the Austrian assured her anew that the hours of waiting would be few, that the Prince was in England against his will, that he could not write because of those who spied upon him.

'In Paris,' he had said, 'there will be no such espionage, because they believe you to be in London. Your father and I have been careful to circulate the report that illness is responsible for your absence from the opera. The Prince's friends will breathe again when he is in Paris. We shall breathe too—the laugh will be with us. Believe me, I would risk much to bring my friend Jerome to this house this very hour, if only to prove my admiration and esteem for Mademoiselle Féo.'

The kindness of the man convinced her, but only for a little while. As the days of waiting became weeks, and she must hear the echo of the life of Paris coming to her as a mock upon the splendour of the house, which was her prison, a woman's sure instinct began to help her; and she awoke from her dreams to ask herself if this very secrecy were not in itself a shame unworthy of her and of the man who loved her. No malefactor banished from Austria for an offence

against its government could have been the object of greater suspicion. Her first argument, that Jerome had wished it, lost its force when he did not come to her. One day she asked herself suddenly if it were indeed Jerome's wish or the wish of those who had separated her from him? In that hour her instinct of doubt was awakened. She uttered no complaint nor betrayed herself, saying that no act of hers should be remembered afterwards as a cause of her lover's absence. But to Lamberg the glove was thrown, and he knew it.

An odd determination, perhaps, to embarrass this man and to prove him carried her to the Bois that afternoon. It was a woman's impulse, and she repented of it when she reached the *chalet* and began to remember how very much alone she was in that world of laughing faces and perpetual chatter. These dark-eyed, daintily-dressed women, whose voices were ever as a shrill note of music in the air, stood so far away from her own world and her own interests. She asked herself if obstinacy had not carried her from the Avenue Marceau; indeed, she was about to retrace her steps, humbly and in penitence, when a carriage passed swiftly through the press of vehicles, and there, sitting on the right-hand seat, with a young Austrian soldier upon his left hand,

was no other than Prince Jerome himself. For an instant she beheld him—the Jerome of the old days, her lover, the man whose promise had been to her as the bread of life. Then the press closed about the carriage. The apparition, as of one long dead seen anew in the glare of the noonday sun, vanished from her sight. She was alone, tottering, faint, crushed as with the burden of her folly.

Unconscious of that which she did, deaf now to the voices of the women, blind to the glitter of the scene, Féo hurried home again. Jerome in Paris! They had lied to her, then! Or had he but just come, and was this the punishment for her obstinacy! The very thought tormented her in an agony of self-reproach. She could picture him hurrying to the house in the Avenue Marceau to hear the story—‘She would not wait, she would not be prudent.’ A whisper of deep foreboding pleaded that he might never return. Her anxiety to know the worst, if the worst must be, quickened her steps and set her heart beating. When some one spoke to her and a hand was laid gently upon her shoulder, she did not hear the words nor feel the touch. She must get home again, she thought.

‘I say, Féo—you don’t mean it! Can’t you spare me a minute?’

She looked up, recognising now the voice and the hand of Leslie Drummond.

'You—here in Paris, Leslie!'

'Well, I think so, unless it's Hyde Park by mistake.'

She hesitated, for she knew that he was her friend.

'Why did you not come to see us?' she asked.

'Come to see you—I like that! Why, I've been to your place twice a day for the last three weeks.'

He shook his curly black hair defiantly, and then perceiving her astonishment, he began to apologise boyishly.

'Of course, it wasn't your fault—I know that. You came here to see the woolly-headed Austrian chap, who's just gone by in a landau that must have been made for Epping Forest. The fellow's been here all day. I half expected to see you in the carriage with him.'

Féo's eyes blazed angrily.

'You must not speak like that of my friends, Leslie. You do not know what his friendship means to me.'

'I'm very sorry, Féo. I can't help chaffing. I wish to God there was nothing to chaff you about. You might have seen me at any rate, just

for the sake of old times. I told you I'd come to Paris if you didn't write to me.'

'But I have written to you twice.'

He stood and looked at her in amazement.

'Some one forgot to post your letters, then.'

'You never received them?'

'Not a letter!'

They walked on for a little way in silence. Féo was very pale, and he could see that she was thinking deeply.

'Tell me, Leslie,' she asked presently, 'what did they say to you when you called at Captain Lamberg's house?'

'They were discreet. They didn't open the door. I don't want to be impolite about your friend, Féo, but I think he's a liar.'

Féo half suppressed a sob.

'He is my father's friend,' she said quickly. 'We came to his house because he said that Jerome wished it and could only see us again if we were in Paris. I dare not think that he has deceived us.'

'Oh, but I dare! If the thing was all square, why is he afraid to open his door when a man knocks decently? You heard him ask me to come and see him. It isn't a case of a broken bell, for I've made enough row to wake the prophets. There's something wrong, Féo, and

the sooner you're both out of that place the better.'

She tried to argue favourably, struggling still with her hope.

'My father declares that he has known Captain Lamberg for ten years. We have everything that we want there, and are very kindly treated. You judge the house from what you see of it. When you come inside you will change your mind.'

Leslie walked on, swinging his stick.

'Possibly I shall—when I come inside. That will be in the day of the Morlocks. It's plain to me that if your Austrian friend expected to find you in the Avenue Marceau, he wouldn't be driving in the Bois de Boulogne. I wish you'd just cut it all and come along and stay at the Chatam. I've plenty of cash: why should we bother about it if we are friends?'

They entered the Avenue Marceau as he spoke. She turned to him with gratitude to be read in her pretty eyes.

'I could never do that, Leslie; it would not be right to you. I am going back now to learn the truth. If it is as you think, I will come to the Hôtel Chatam to-morrow to tell you so. If you wish to be my friend, do not let them see us together here. I am very grateful to you, Leslie.'

She pressed his hand and was gone in an instant. He followed her with wistful gaze. Ah, this Paris, if it could have given him Féo, what a bounty of life would have been his! For he began to realise that this handsome, helpless, winsome girl was more to him than all else that men appraise or seek of fortune.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIE

FÉO was breathless when she entered the garden of Lamberg's house and stood again hearing the protestations of the *concierge* that his master had already gone to look for her.

'Monsieur, your father, is upstairs. I think that they wish to see you very much, mademoiselle. The Captain went out a quarter of an hour ago and has not returned. There was a telegram.'

For an instant it seemed to Féo that all her fabric of doubt and suspicion was destroyed by such news. A telegram had come; it was the telegram which announced Jerome's arrival. Captain Lamberg had gone out to look for her! It was to carry the good tidings to her. She thought how easy it was to misunderstand the motives of others; and so ran up quickly to find her father.

Old Georges de Berthier was reading the *Figaro* in the library. The indispensable cigarette helped to remind him of the new content of

life which had come to him in Paris. He was almost affable when Féo entered the room, and had no complaint of his ailments ready for her.

'Well,' he exclaimed, 'so you did not meet the Captain?'

She threw herself upon the great lounge at his side and told him her news without disguise.

'Jerome is in Paris. I have just seen him in the Bois. I suppose that was why Captain Lamberg went to look for me.'

Berthier crumpled up the paper in his hand and sat reflective and not a little astonished, as one called upon to pronounce suddenly upon a very difficult affair.

'No,' he said very slowly and after an interval of embarrassing silence, 'he did not tell me that. A telegram came, and he went out to look for you immediately. If Jerome is in Paris, he will come here to-day—or—he will never come at all, my child.'

He turned round in his chair and looked her full in the face. She was very pale, he thought, and there was a strange light in her eyes which he had never seen before. But she did not express astonishment that he should speak in such a way, and her answer was a question.

'Father,' she asked, 'why did we come to Paris?'

'You know why we came, Féo.'

'You believe that Captain Lamberg told you the truth?'

'Why should I not believe it? He is a Cuirassier of the Guard and Jerome's friend.'

'But if he should have told you a lie?'

The old man's fingers began to play with the paper nervously. He knew well that he dared not answer the question.

'Do not trouble your head with such ideas,' he said presently; 'men do not invite to their houses those whom they wish to rob. If Jerome does not come here, it will be because his father has seen fit to prevent him.'

'In that case what are we going to do?'

Berthier knitted his brows and began to puff at his cigarette. His answer was a running commentary upon his own ideas.

'They sent us away from Vienna when we could have made our fortunes there. We have suffered much at their hands, for they sought to prevent our success in London as they are now trying to do us an injury in Paris. If they are honourable men, they will make us some compensation for that which we have suffered. I shall not go to them as a beggar, Féo, be sure of that. I do not forget that I am an artist and a gentleman. But if we are to be left in Paris,

after all that has happened, it would be bare justice to ask them either to find you a new engagement or the equivalent of it. Of course the Prince may come yet, and that would be the end of the difficulty. I trust it may be so. I am a proud man, and this intrigue is hurtful to my pride. The future is full of anxiety—of grave anxiety.'

Féo laughed a little hardly. She was beginning to see the terrible indignity which her continued residence in Paris must put upon her.

'You were wrong to come to Paris at all, father,' she said quietly. 'If it means so much to Jerome's friends that he should see me again, I will not see him at all. Can't you understand the shame of our position? Why were you not frank with me before you left London? You owed it to me. You, at least, should have saved me from this dreadful mistake.'

'Come, come, you must not talk like that, child. What I have done, I have done for your happiness. Is it my fault that these people must only marry with their equals? There are twenty princes morganatically married in Europe to-day. Their lives are secret as your life will be secret. They are not ashamed; why should they be? I shall take care that we suffer no indignity. The

sacrifices I have made are not to be considered lightly. I do not expect you to remember them ; children never do. But your future is my proper care ; and if these people continue their persecution, they shall pay for it—that is all. In the meantime we will wait and see. Our suspicions may be wrong. Let us be just before all things.'

He could protest with a fine air of honesty and of truth ; but the day had been long distant when such protestations deceived Féo in any way. She did not, upon the instant, realise the whole meaning of the satisfaction he hinted at as a recompense for the evil days in Vienna ; but the conviction grew upon her that she was the victim of a lie, and she would have said as much but for the return of Lamberg himself, who came hurrying to the library, and did not conceal his satisfaction at finding her there.

'Ah, mademoiselle, you are really here ! And I have been walking round and round the *chalet* like a horse in the circus. That was not kind of you.'

Féo stood up to answer him.

'I met a friend, Mr. Drummond of London ; and I hear that Prince Jerome is in Paris, Captain Lamberg.'

Lamberg's face blanched visibly, but long

practice had given him good weapons for such an encounter.

'I am glad that you met your English friend, Miss Féo. He must come and see us. Your other story, unfortunately, is not true. The Prince is still at Windsor, but he has promised to be in Paris in three days' time.'

Féo laughed lightly.

'How you console me, Captain!' she said with an assumption of girlish indifference.

'Not so; I must leave that to another friend of yours.'

'Who is coming on Saturday?'

'Who is coming on Saturday.'

'Unfailingly?'

'He will move heaven and earth to come.'

'What a dreadful undertaking!'

'Not dreadful in certain cases, Miss Féo.'

'Then we may expect him on Monday?'

'I said Saturday, mademoiselle.'

'But I wish to give the universe a chance.'

Old Berthier laughed heartily.

'It is no good to contradict a woman,' he said; 'let us make it Monday, and have our tea.'

Féo assented, still jesting with them.

'Things that happen to-morrow are always better than those which happen to-day,' she said; 'that is why the truth is often such

an uncomfortable guest. Don't you think so, Captain?'

He looked at her sharply, and as their eyes met, he knew that she believed him no longer. And this was true, for Féo went to her room to tell herself that Otto Lamberg had lied to her, and that she would remain in his house no longer. But old Georges de Berthier, sipping his tea in the library, asked himself how much the Archduke Frederick would pay for a promise that Féo should see his son no more.

CHAPTER IX

UNMASKED

FÉO went straight to her room and drew a chair to the window that she might think upon all the day had taught her. It was a large room, furnished with great taste, and looking over a little court at the back of the house. She could see nothing of the life of Paris from its windows, only the quaint old court with the great green pots and the stunted palms in them, and the low wing of a neighbouring mansion which here jutted out and touched the kitchen buildings below her. Beyond the courtyard, and the high walls to which it extended, there lay another of those great avenues which radiate from the Arc de l'Étoile. She could hear a low murmur of the city's life, a voice of Paris at the zenith of the springtime, coming to her over the forgotten garden and the gloomy barrier of brick and ailing tree. She knew that she was in the gayest city in the world, and yet she had never felt so utterly alone. The sap of her spirit had dried up

suddenly ; the dream of the days during which she had waited for Jerome to come was over. She understood now that he would never come.

It was a bitter reflection, not so much of her disappointment as of the shame her presence in that house implied. Never for a moment did she doubt now that she had been brought there, not at her lover's wish, but at the will of those who would keep her from her lover. In her first keen self-reproach, she was sure that her father was privy to the conspiracy. He had sold his honour for the money of those who had put a slight upon him in Vienna, and had sent him out, a beggar, to the capitals of the West. She was of age now, being in her twenty-fourth year, to be blinded no longer by that inborn reverence which makes the child the last to admit the father's sin. She knew her father in his every mood, his selfishness, his little petty cunningness, his jealousy of her success, his generosity to those who had no claim upon him. She could not hide it from herself that he would do even this. No other conclusion of her charity was possible. He had heard the Austrian lie to her. He had said nothing. Whatever evil was being wrought against her, to that her father was a party.

She came to such an understanding as she sat at her window and listened to the murmur of the

life of Paris and the whisper of the June breeze in the blackened trees. Jerome was in the city, she said. Perchance he had come there to seek her. An exquisite hope of the thought was born in her heart as she dwelt upon the reflection. She lived again in those moments all those unforgotten days of her love-dream in the East. She could remember the very words her lover had spoken to her; his gentleness, his vows, his care for her, his protestation that whatever might befall, he would follow her to the end of the world. What joy of life had been hers when in city and in forest she could find a bower of her affections, when the very secrecy of her love had been the keystone of a child's romance! To-day that joy might return to her. If she could see Jerome! If she could leave that house of gloom behind her and go again to the sunshine of freedom, and care not though all Paris were the witness! It was a woman's resolution, yet none the less sure for that. She determined, on the instant, to leave that place, and to go, she cared not whither, if it were not to her lover's side.

No one had followed her upstairs during the hour when she sat at her bedroom window and found herself for the first time face to face with the story of the intrigue. Once, when she

listened for a little while at the stair's head, she thought that she could hear her father's voice; and afterwards a door was shut loudly and the sound of voices ceased. She imagined then that she was alone in the house, and the name of Leslie Drummond occurred to her as one who would befriend her in such an hour. Excited, as she had never been before, in the thought of flight and the possibilities of flight, she put on her hat quickly, and ran down the stairs. There was only the *concierge* at the great front door, and he, as ever, had a smile and a ready word for her.

'I am going to the Hôtel Chatam to see Mr. Drummond, an Englishman,' she said; 'if my father should ask, you will tell him. I do not know when I shall return.'

A strange expression came upon the man's face. He did not attempt to open the door.

'Mademoiselle,' he protested, 'forgive me; it is not my wish, but my order. Your father does not think it prudent for you to go out again until he has returned. A thousand apologies, mademoiselle——'

Féo stood dumfounded. The door was locked. The man did not move.

'You do not mean to say that I am to be kept here against my will?'

The *concierge* shrugged his shoulders as though this were the worst hour of his life.

'It is not that, mademoiselle. Be reasonable. I am only the servant. When monsieur comes home he will explain.'

Féo did not hear him; but turning quickly she ran upstairs to her room again.

CHAPTER X

A WOMAN'S WAY

It was six o'clock then. She could hear the musical bells of the churches across the river chiming the hour when she shut the door of her bedroom again. In the house itself unbroken silence reigned. The whisper of breeze no longer shivered in the blackened trees. Paris was returning from the Bois, and would cease to laugh until the sun had set.

Féo shut the door and took off her hat. She was not sorry that the man had told her the truth; for now the secret of the house was hers. She had never liked Otto Lamberg from the moment when first he paid her one of his pretty compliments in London. She knew that some mystery lay behind that story which he told so pleasantly. But that this should be truth—this intrigue which would keep her from Jerome and make her a prisoner of the house until her lover had quitted Paris—had been beyond the province of her reckoning. Not for a moment could she

doubt that her old enemies in Austria had contrived so clumsy a conspiracy. Wise friends in Vienna once had said, 'Beware, for these people have long arms and can strike in many countries.' She had laughed at them then. And, not a little to her astonishment, she found that she could laugh again now when one of these arms had been stretched out to touch her, and a paid intriguer had justified her friends of their boasts. The plot seemed to her to be as poorly conceived as it was impotent. That very hour should defeat it. She took the resolution there and then, and once taken she cleaved to it tenaciously.

A great gift of courage and of spirit had been hers since her childhood. It was odd that this sudden realisation of her danger in that house of mystery should arouse these latent qualities and vivify them in the moment when nerve and a good heart were sorely needed. What the extent of the intrigue might be, how far the agents of the Archduke would go, she could not imagine. Sufficient that she was a prisoner in the house, that Jerome had come to Paris to seek her, that her father had lent himself shamefully to the intentions of those who had waged so pitiless a war against a helpless girl. The assurance that she stood alone nerved her to the encounter. She

had determined already that she would find a road to freedom. In her calmer moments there was a great dread of that which the silent, mysterious house might contain. Her imagination peopled it with enemies who had not the silver tongue and the plausibility of Otto Lamberg. She listened for any sounds ; the creak of a board made her heart beat. The odd thought came to her that she was watched, and panic followed upon her laughter. But it was only for a moment. The night should take her—she cared not whither, if it would but give her freedom.

She had locked the door of her room when she returned to it, and now she began to count the money she had in her purse and to put some of her pretty clothes in the great black dress basket. It was pathetic to remember that she must leave these clothes behind her ; but she amused herself with the intention to write for them and to say that they might be sent, carriage unpaid, to some new lodgings. When she had done everything to her satisfaction, she opened the door again and listened. A dark corridor, running the whole length of the house, seemed to lead from her bedroom to the servants' quarters. The idea came to her to explore the corridor and to ascertain if it would afford any way of egress of which she was then in ignorance. There was no one in

that wing of the house that she could see ; and when she had found the courage, she set out boldly, treading the corridor with light steps, and coming at last to a winding iron staircase which, she thought, must bring her to the servants' hall. She had her hand already upon the balustrade of the landing when a man appeared noiselessly from one of the rooms near by, and, appearing to be astonished at her presence, began to remonstrate with her.

'Mademoiselle,' he said appealingly, 'that is the way to the kitchen.'

Féo turned and stared at him. He was a strongly built man, with short hair and a French type of face. The door of the room behind him was still ajar, and she could see other men sitting at a little table and playing cards there.

'But, monsieur, I want to go into the garden. It is suffocating here.'

The man pointed to the great staircase at the other end of the corridor.

'That way, if you please, mademoiselle.'

He entered the little room again and shut the door after him. Féo stood an instant debating it ; then she returned slowly to her own apartment. That which she had seen frightened her as she had never been frightened before in all her life. It was not so much the word of the man as

the tone in which he had spoken. She asked herself, what all these servants were doing in Lamberg's house? Why had she never seen them before? What would happen to her when the hour for civility had passed finally, and no mask was needed? They might even dare so much as to kill her. She laughed at herself for such a foolish fancy, and once more locked herself in her bedroom.

She had been dressed for walking when she packed her clothes, and she put on her hat again as the hour for dinner drew near. Minute by minute the tension of the scene was awaking faculties long spellbound in the dreams of a child's romance. She must leave the house that night; must go to Jerome, she said. The daring of the resolve was as strong wine to one who had all the nervous impulses and exciting passions of the artist. The hazard of that which she contemplated never so much as occurred to her. She was in a trap, and a woman's wit must get her out. When the maid came up at half-past seven to dress her for dinner, she pleaded a headache and desired to be excused. A second message from her father was answered as the first. She was going to bed, she said, and would not dine with them that night.

The maid went away, and another hour of soli-

tude passed. Looking from her open window, down upon the leads of the building below her, she could understand why she had never seen any one there, and why they had put her in that lonely wing. The high wall at the rear of the garden was a sentinel more formidable than any servant of Austria. No woman unaided could pass there. Moreover, her room lay twenty feet above the leads, and descent thereto must be beyond word perilous. Everything had been calculated by this man whom Jerome's friends had sent to be her gaoler. She repeated the assurance often as twilight deepened and, in the sky above, the red glow of the city's lamps began to mark the vigil of the night. Everything had been thought of. Even if she could reach the garden, there was no way out of it save by the gate in the Avenue Marceau ; no way at all, she said, except by the public gate or that little window in the wing of the neighbouring house—a window through which a child could hardly climb, so small was it. Little need, truly, that they should spy upon the garden.

She argued with herself in this way many times as she waited for the dark to come. She was quite sure of her conclusions. If the window had but been large enough, she might have descended into the garden by the cord of one of her boxes

and have gained admittance into the big house next door. No enemies would be there; and strangers, surely, would help her in this strange dilemma. The idea of appearing suddenly in the household of her neighbours amused her. She began to ask if, after all, the little window which overlooked the Count's house, might not be large enough for her to climb through. Her pretty figure was slim, if shapely. Nevertheless, the window was very small. And who would open it to her? She had never seen any one in the neighbouring house. Failure was not to be thought of. Indeed, she had almost abandoned her project when a glimmer of light shone suddenly behind the very glass which provoked her argument; and she knew that some one was in that room through which alone she could pass to freedom.

Her heart was beating fast now, and mechanically she began to loosen the rope which bound her trunk, and to tie it, and tie it again, to the foot of a great bureau on the left-hand side of her own window. It was quite dark at the moment, and she was glad of that, for the darkness hid the terror of the abyss below her, and she could think only of that which she had to do to gain the freedom which meant so much to her. She knew that any noise would betray her, even

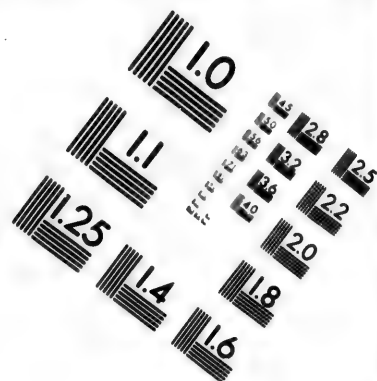
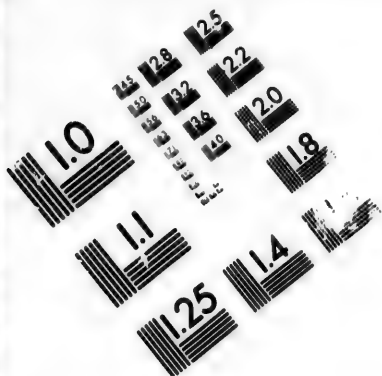
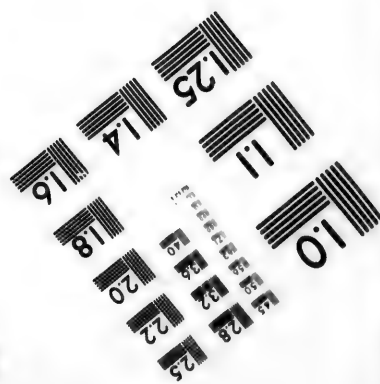
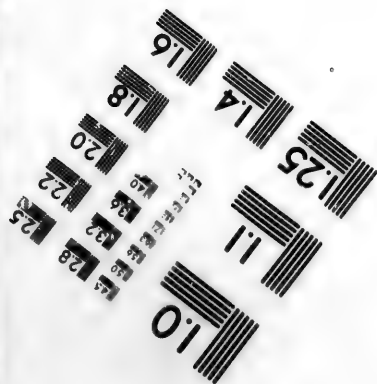
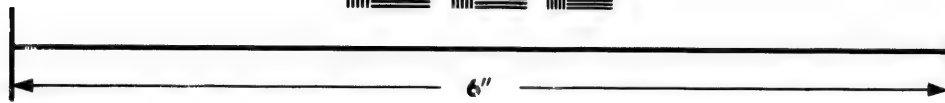
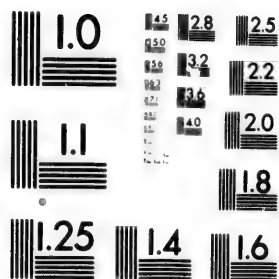


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the sound of her own footsteps ; and she drew off her pretty French shoes and thrust them in the bosom of her dress. Her own daring amazed her. She had always feared a height ; had feared even to stand at a puny cliff's edge or to look down from one of those high windows in the great hotels of London. If she had not said to herself again and again, ' Jerome is in the city waiting for me,' her new resolution would have melted away at the beginning of it. But this thought of the reward of freedom was as a gift of courage beyond her dreams. Trembling, with a laugh upon her lips, half afraid, strong in hope, she clutched the cord and swung out over the abyss. She was going to her lover.

It was a still night, very dark and starless, and full of silence out there in the garden. She had swung herself well away from the window, fearing that her dress might catch in some outstanding ironwork ; but the rope swayed horribly and carried her out beyond the limit of the leads, so that she could look down and see the gravel path forty feet below her, and realise that it would be instant death to fall there. It came to her in such a moment that her life depended upon her nerve. An overwhelming sense of giddiness and terror troubled her ; she tried convulsively to grasp again the ledge of the window and to pull herself

back into the room ; but the rope continued to swing, and she clutched it with fingers made strong in the fear of death.

Inch by inch now she began to let herself down toward the place of safety. Her imagination played strange tricks with her. There was a dreadful instant when she could depict herself falling through infinite space, falling until her brain reeled and her heart stood still. She had the temptation to throw herself down, and thus to end that intolerable agony of suspense. Nevertheless, a truer instinct saved her. She saw again that courage alone could win her freedom. When her feet at last touched the leads, she was almost impotent in terror. But she knew that she was saved, and the joy of that thought brought tears to her eyes.

Freedom, she stood so close to it now ! A few steps across the leads, an effort to pass the low wall intervening, and there was the window which had cost her so much to reach. It was larger than it had seemed when she looked down upon it from above ; and she realised that she could easily pass there if only some one would open to her. And so she tapped, once, twice ; and becoming bolder, she tried to shake the glass—and then for the first time remembered where she stood and realised her folly. Some one might hear her

in the house she had left. She paused with quaking heart to listen for any sound which would speak of pursuit. The distant murmur of the life of Paris quickened her impatience. She was so near to liberty—so near to the goal for which she had dared so much.

No one answered her knock upon the glass, and she repeated it, being greatly afraid to stand alone when any hazard might tell her story to Lamberg and her father, and bring her gaolers to the place. Once she thought to hear a man's voice in the gardens beneath the great wall; and she crouched close to the little window, and feared to move or breathe a full breath. A little spell of waiting, and she was sure of her suppositions. Men were there in the darkness; she could hear them whispering. She knew not who they might be if not the servants of the man who had wished to keep her a prisoner in his house. The murmur of their voices affrighted her to the last point. She did not lift a hand while many long minutes passed, and when next she dared to tap upon the window the clocks of Paris were striking one.

It had been an act of despair rather than of hope which led her thus to brave discovery again; but there was no sound of voices in the garden when she did so, and the night breeze had given her courage back to her. When the window was opened to her knock, she could laugh at

her own surprise. The joy of success made her almost hysterical. A light flashed in her eyes; she heard some one speaking to her. She was as a child released suddenly from a room wherein it has been punished for a fault.

‘Who is there; who knocks?’

‘I am an Englishwoman; they have kept me in this house against my will. Permit me to pass into the street, and I will be grateful to you, monsieur.’

‘But, mademoiselle, the window is so small.’

‘I am small, too, monsieur; if you hesitate, they will hear us. Please help me!’

The man held up the light, and peeped through the window. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘hold my hand tightly; now raise yourself; ah, you are tearing your dress, mademoiselle; gently, gently; what a hurry you are in!’

Féo dropped lightly to the floor of the coach-house, for it was to the coach-house of the neighbouring dwelling that the window admitted her. She had torn her dress at the shoulder, her hands were as black as those of the man who had helped her to the ground; she stood a picture of merriment and gladness. At last she was free. The adventure seemed to her now to be something to laugh at until the end of her life. Her new ally joined in her merriment.

‘Ah, mademoiselle,’ he said, ‘what a thing it is to be young!’

He was an ill-dressed fellow, slovenly, and with blinking eyes, which moved restlessly in the fitful light. Féo, while she thought that he was the neighbour's coachman, began to be a little afraid of him.

'I have friends at the Hôtel Chatam who are waiting for me,' she exclaimed; 'if you will let me into the street, I shall be very much obliged to you.'

The man put down the lantern deliberately.

'Come,' he said, 'this story won't do. When a young lady runs away from a house at midnight, it is time some one speaks to her father.'

A new fear, greater than any she had known in the garden, seized upon Féo as she heard him.

'I am telling you the truth,' she protested; 'you can come to the hotel with me and prove it. They kept me in that house against my wish,—that is why I am here.'

The man laughed coarsely.

'Bravo! you have it all ready, mademoiselle. And how much will you pay me if I forget that I am an honest man?'

She answered him by taking out an old purse and opening it. The man drew a step nearer, and a strange light came into his eyes. She did not know that he was one of the vagrants of Paris come to sleep in that empty coach-house during

the owner's absence from the city. He, in turn, was using his bleared eyes to see if she wore jewellery.

'How much will you give me, mademoiselle?'

'I will give you twenty francs!'

'Not enough, not enough. I go every Lent to hear Père Didon at Notre Dame. I am an honest man, and twenty francs do not buy me.'

Some instinct told her at that moment that this was the greatest peril of her life. She pushed the purse into the man's hand, and slipped quickly toward the door.

'That is all the money I have. If you do not take it, I can go back and tell them what you say, monsieur.'

The man thrust the purse into his ragged coat, and stood listening. There was no sound in the street without, but in the garden of Lamberg's house he could hear footsteps and low cries. A moment's argument convinced him that safety lay in his victim's escape.

'There,' he said, opening the door of the coach-house a little way, 'you can go now, mademoiselle.'

She fled from the place as from a nameless terror. She had gained her liberty, and stood alone, in the dead of night, homeless and without refuge in the pitiless city of Paris.

CHAPTER XI

THE VIOLON

THE stable gave upon the broad Avenue de l'Alma. Féo did not know the name of the Avenue; but a sure instinct turned her steps toward the heart of Paris; and thither she hastened to the lights and the ebbing life of the city's night. Of her own danger, save it were the danger in the house she had quitted, she would not think. She had the vague notion that she would find Leslie Drummond's hôtel, and there would tell her story to an English friend. He would help her to discover Jerome. At the worst he would save her from these unknown enemies who had contrived so shameless an outrage.

She feared pursuit, and she went quickly, avoiding the open places where the light fell, and keeping close in the shadow of the trees which lined the Avenue. Ever and anon she would listen for the footsteps which should speak of her peril; but all was quiet in that lonely place,

and what murmur of sound arose came to her from the distant boulevards. The silence affrighted her. She had a great desire to be where the world was; to see the lamps before the cafés; above all, to find her friend. When she came out to the banks of the Seine and began to hurry along the Quai de la Conférence towards the gardens of the Tuileries, the moon shone out suddenly; and she beheld the black river giving sheen of gold where the white beams touched it. There were many upon the pavements now: rough fellows from the barges and the boats, who stared at her curiously; wan women huddled beneath the shelter of the parapets to ask of night that the day might be forgotten; hunters of garbage who worked by the lantern's light; hawkers and thieves and footpads going southward to their homes. But she passed so quickly that none observed her; or, observing, had no will to stop her. A woman hastening at such an hour! To a rendezvous, they said. They guessed the truth, yet not the whole of it.

The breeze was very sweet, there upon the quays of the Seine; and when she came to the Place de la Concorde, she had no mind to turn from the river's bank. The excitement of escape—since escape was then assured—had abated somewhat, and left her to reason with the hour

and her own need. Her first impulse held good no longer. She laughed at the idea of going to Leslie's hôtel at two o'clock in the morning, or of ringing up a night-porter to carry her message. Nor could she imagine where she might find a lodging. Though the man in the stable had taken her silver, she had a twenty-franc piece in a little sovereign purse attached to her key-ring; but what would an hotel-keeper say to her if she came to his house at such an hour! She determined rather to walk until dawn, and then to seek shelter as one who had just come into Paris by train, and had left her luggage at the Gare. Her sense of humour delighted her with the picture of her father's face when he had discovered that she was no longer in Lamberg's house. The joy of that victory surpassed all discomforts that the night might give her. She was a partner no longer in her father's shame, and never again would she look to him for home or shelter.

The resolution encouraged her. She walked at her leisure, for she had come to the gardens of the Tuileries, and the lights at the heart of Paris were soon to shine upon her. By here and there, some gruesome spectacle of the city's darker life could make her tremble or warm her heart to pity. In the Rue de Rivoli itself a party of drunken soldiers stopped her; and one of

them, a young officer of cavalry, seized her by the wrist, and dragged her to the aureole of light which a street lamp cast upon the pavement.

'Ho, ho! here is my friend, Mademoiselle la Douleureuse. What do you say, mademoiselle—shall we kill the Jews?'

'Monsieur,' she said quietly, 'I think that you had better go home.'

A roar of laughter greeted the reply. One of the man's comrades pushed him aside and bowed to her gallantly.

'Mademoiselle,' he exclaimed, 'will you cry, *Vive l'Armée?*'

'I would much sooner cry for a cabman.'

'Mademoiselle! I am desolate. I have no mother, mademoiselle. Permit me to kiss your hand.'

She shrank back from them, wrestling with the man. A *sergent de ville*, who had watched the affair from the other side of the road, crossed slowly, and began to interest himself.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the army goes to bed early; I will look after this young lady.'

They greeted him with incoherent cries, and passed on toward the Place shouting, '*A mort les Juifs!*' But the officer himself turned to Féo.

'Where are you going to, mademoiselle?'

'To my friends at the Hôtel Chatam. I am an Englishwoman and have lost my way.'

He looked at her, doubting.

'You are very late, mademoiselle?'

'Much later than I wish to be.'

'And you will permit me to show you the Hôtel?'

The question confused her. She hesitated to seek out even such an old friend as Leslie Drummond at such an hour.

'Thank you, sergeant, I know the way now. The Hôtel is just here.'

She turned and hurried on without waiting for his answer. The question set her thinking. How could she pass those hours of waiting until day came? Everywhere about her the night-birds of Paris were going to bed. Carriages, whose bright electric lamp showed her the women she had envied that afternoon in the Bois, women now in splendid gowns, with a burden of sparkling gems about their throats, rolled westward toward the avenues she had left. The cafés were closing their doors. Those who had neither a home by day nor a bed by night turned to the bridges spanning the river and to the dark places where crime and poverty and dirt should give them harbourage. Every man whom she passed regarded her with a look of insult or of questioning

surprise. She began to realise how very much alone she was—and yet she would not seek the Hôtel Chatam. She feared to compromise herself. It was always in her mind that, if she went there, the Austrian would follow her.

This fear of the house she had left was, in truth, the paramount trouble. It was weary work to pace those silent streets when her limbs ached and her eyes were heavy with sleep; but the very hour gave a certain recompense; and she fell to thinking of all the people dreaming up there behind the lightless windows,—of the countless poor huddled in their dens,—of all that strange striving world for the most part at rest and forgetting its strife. From such thoughts the bright lamps about the gates of the Palais Royal carried her to a remembrance of her last visit to Paris, when Jerome's love for her had banished her from Vienna. Her father had come to this city seeking for his daughter a fame that should be his fortune. Old Georges de Berthier had spoken then of a triumph she must win at the great opera house. She could see that very opera house—yonder, in the distance, where the lights of the avenue merged into a nebula as of stars, and the glare from the boulevards still gave a loom of crimson cloud to the sky. It was odd that this new visit to Paris should find her

homeless, without a friend, abroad, she knew not upon what quest of fortune. To-morrow she would have to begin to earn her bread for herself. To-night at least she was not hungry.

She could laugh at the anticipation of the morrow, for she did not yet realise the full meaning of that which she had done, or its moment. It would be a good story to tell Jerome when at last she found him. She could pass the long night somehow. Though the silence of the watching hours was the more profound as the moments passed, it no longer frightened her. She told herself that some one at least would be awake until dawn came, if only it were a *sergent de ville*. And there would be life in the railway stations. She wondered she had not thought of a railway station before. Grateful to her inspiration she set out to walk rapidly toward the Gare de Lyon and the eastern quarter of the city.

The moon was at its full by this time. It shone white and glorious upon the swirling waters of the river. She could see the towers of Notre Dame standing up as stately landmarks above that church which had witnessed so many of the triumphs and the tragedies of these people of Paris. The fresh breezes from the water helped her to keep awake. How unreal the

night seemed! She asked herself if she had done well, thus to leave her father upon an impulse and to go to such a hazardous venture. Standing there upon the Pont Neuf and looking down to the black river below, she thought that she could read the hearts of those wretched creatures whom this city had driven out to the refuge of the waters. Her musings took a strange and gloomy turn. She had begun to forget her own courage, when she heard a warning footstep and turned to see the *sergent de ville* who had questioned her in the Rue de Rivoli.

'Ah, mademoiselle! you have not found your hôtel, then.'

Féo knew that her cheeks were aflame, and was grateful for the darkness.

'No, monsieur, I prefer the fresh air.'

'Is it the custom in England for young ladies to pass the night in the streets?'

She shrugged her shoulders, and remembered to her annoyance that the man in the stable had robbed her of all her money. There was only the twenty-franc piece left in the little purse upon her key-ring. For this she began to search. She must make a friend of the man.

'There has been a misunderstanding,' she said. 'To-morrow will clear it up, but I really don't know where to go to-night. If you could show

me a lodging, I would give you five francs. I have only twenty francs left until the morning.'

The *sergent de ville* came quite close to her.

'When young ladies, who are in trouble, stand upon the bridges looking down into the river, mademoiselle, it is certainly time that some one should find them a lodging. You have friends at the Hôtel Chatam? Very well, then, come with me, and I will help you to find those friends.'

She looked at him with astonishment written upon her laughing eyes. 'You don't mean to say that you thought——'

His answer was a gesture as of one who would say, 'What else am I to think?'

'But really, sergeant, that is very ridiculous.'

'To you possibly, mademoiselle; to your friends not so amusing. Come with me to the Préfecture, and we will find out what they think of it.'

He laid a firm hand upon her arm, and led her across the bridge. In spite of herself, the ridiculous situation in which her escapade had placed her won upon her humour. The sergeant said that he had seen many a girl try to throw herself from the Pont Neuf, but never one who was so amused by her madness.

'Come, mademoiselle, you have done wrong,

and will be grateful to me to-morrow. I would not laugh so loudly if I were you.'

'But I cannot help it, monsieur. Where are you taking me to?'

'To the Préfecture. The rogues of Paris call it the violon.'

'You mean that I am to go to the police-station.'

'If you please, mademoiselle.'

CHAPTER XII

WHILE PARIS SLEPT

THEY crossed the Pont Neuf, and passed along the Quai de l'Horloge. Notwithstanding the hour, there were many about the gates of the Palais de Justice—*sergents* in their black cloaks and military caps and high boots; officers of police in their dark uniforms; detectives quit of their disguises; even Republican guards with their shining brass helmets and their clumsy black horses. From the Préfecture itself a blaze of light shone out as from a mighty lamp casting bright beams upon the sleeping city, to be the messenger of her security. Wretched creatures, chiffonniers, thieves, ragged women, children old in crime, were the offerings of the night to the capacious maw of justice. The dens of crime were opened, and those who strove with crime had forgotten how to sleep.

To these sights, to this world of justice watchful, the *sergent de ville* carried Féo. She was still very much amused, and the man's

misplaced sympathy appealed to her ever-ready humour. But she did not fail to see that her adventure had come to a strange end; and her head was full of the many stories she might tell when a magistrate or inspector, or whoever it might be, came to question her. Once, indeed, when a ruffian in filthy rags wrestled with an officer and laid his grimy hand roughly upon her arm, she experienced for an instant that great dread of the law which is ever the right of those who have always obeyed the law. There by the water's edge were the towers of the terrible Conciergerie—that gloomy prison, whose dungeons, as a poet of France has said, could not contain the tears shed within them. She asked herself how if, by some subtlety of law, she should find herself in such a prison as that. The cloudless sky above, the glorious moonlight upon the spire of the Sainte Chapelle, the shining water, the sweet breeze of the summer night, were Nature's common gifts, which, at any other hour, she would have looked upon as the elementary dues of her life. But in that moment they became to her as emblems of her freedom. How if anything should deprive her of that freedom?

It was not a very profound philosophy, perhaps, and she had forgotten it before they crossed the square of the palace, and stood under the little

red lamp which marked the door of the police-station. Her curiosity helped her to this forgetfulness. What were they going to do with her? she asked herself. Surely it was no crime in Paris to be found out of your house, when a policeman thought that you should be in your bed. She determined that silence was her best friend; and resolute at any hazard to give them no clue to the affair in the Avenue Marceau, she entered the police-station.

It was a small room, brightly lighted, but destitute of any furniture. An inspector, seated at a desk upon the right-hand side of the entrance, put on his glasses when the *sergent de ville* began his explanation; and others, officers on duty, detectives, spies, grouped themselves about her, and began to stare at her as at one who had lost the right to resent such attentions. She, in turn, remembered that she was an Englishwoman, and drew herself up proudly, repressing that haunting smile which would hover about the corners of the mouth. What might happen in that place was of no concern to her, unless it should take her back to the Avenue Marceau, to the house of the man who had sought to keep her from Jerome. She did not think that any law could so compel a woman; and with this hope to give her courage, she listened to the inspector.

'Mademoiselle, you say that you are English. Will you please to give us your name? You speak French, mademoiselle?'

'All English people speak French,' she answered with a laugh; 'if the French do not understand them, it is their misfortune.'

The inspector stared at her through his gold-rimmed glasses.

'Come, mademoiselle, we do not wish to be amused. You speak French charmingly. Please to tell me your name.'

'My name is Féo de Berthier. I am an Englishwoman. I live in Oxford Street, which is in London, monsieur. I have friends at the Hôtel Chatam. Please do not ask me any more questions, for I am tired.'

She spoke very rapidly, with the air of one who would say, 'There it all is; please let us have done with it.' The inspector, who had begun to enter her name in his book, but who could not keep up with her torrent of words, put down his pen despairingly.

'Ha!' he exclaimed, 'you should go to the Palais Royal. Where do you say that your friends are?'

'At the Hôtel Chatam. Send there to Mr. Leslie Drummond, and he will tell you all about me. I am tired of talking to people about myself.'

'But we are very much interested, mademoiselle. When a young lady walks about the streets of Paris at two o'clock in the morning, she cannot fail to be interesting.'

'Is it forbidden in Paris to walk about the streets at two o'clock in the morning?'

'Under certain circumstances, certainly it is forbidden. The officer has done well to bring you here. Your actions were suspicious.'

'How important you make me feel, monsieur! To think that I was only an ordinary person yesterday, and now, why even you are interested in me!'

The officer smiled in spite of himself. A pretty woman wins her way anyway; and Féo had never looked so pretty. Her very want of colour, the warning lines beneath her eyes, gave her piquant face an added charm. The detectives said that she had quarrelled with her lover, and ceased to interest themselves in her professionally. But there were many in that room who would have thought themselves happy to have been in the lover's place.

'Tell us why you have left your friends, mademoiselle?'

'For a very simple reason: I no longer wished to stay with them.'

'You mean that you had some trouble which took you from home?'

'My friends would call it that. I call it a difference of opinion. You see how logical I am.'

'And if we were to send you back to the Hôtel Chatam now, you would promise not to look into the river again?'

Féo burst out laughing.

'Oh, monsieur,' she said, 'please don't be stupid. If you knew how I disliked the water!'

The officer nodded his head, and conferred a moment with the *sergent*. Féo was very tired, and prone to be a little hysterical. She was worn out with the effort of the night.

'How long must I stand here?' she asked wearily.

The words were magical. Three of the detectives ran to bring a chair. The inspector himself came out of his box and looked at her.

'Come,' he said, 'we are not going to be unkind to you. I have sent a messenger to the Hôtel Chatam. Your friends will return with him. Meanwhile——'

He hesitated. The girl's hope waxed strong. She was not to be asked about the Avenue Marceau, then.

'Yes, monsieur, meanwhile?'

'Meanwhile we shall give you a glass of wine. This way, if you please, mademoiselle.'

He opened the door of a smaller room behind the office, and bade her enter. An officer in uniform carried a bottle of good Bordeaux, and set it on the plain wooden table. Féo sank into the deal chair as though she would never have the strength to rise again.

'You are very kind to me,' she said. 'I shall be interesting to my English friends for the rest of my life. To have spent a night in the Préfecture! Some people would lecture about it, monsieur.'

'Drink a glass of wine, mademoiselle, and that will help you to be eloquent. To-morrow you will laugh at it all. And you will say that we were not such dreadful people. We do not eat our prisoners.'

He pushed the glass toward her and watched her drink the wine. Then he returned to his desk. A *sergent de ville* had come in with two women, whose cries and oaths resounded through the building in a deafening clamour. Something of the more terrible side of Paris life was shown to her in that moment. She beheld the women striking at each other and at the officers who held them; she saw them surrounded by many men, who pinioned them, and so carried them to that corridor of police cells which Paris has called 'the mousetrap.' It

was a vivid, haunting scene ; it compelled her to say again, 'How if I were never to escape from this place?' The contrasts of her life were odd indeed. She was singing at Covent Garden but a few days ago ; was dreaming of the day when the triumphs of Melba and Calvé might be hers. To-night, the singer had become a prisoner in the greatest of the prisons of Paris ; she had left her father for ever ; was alone, without a friend, unless Leslie Drummond should come to her, in the greatest crisis of her life. And of all her thoughts, this latter nerved her most surely. She told herself courageously that she would find Jerome to-morrow, though her father himself came to the Conciergerie to forbid her freedom.

Others were brought to the Préfecture—a beggar accused of picking pockets ; a young soldier charged with stabbing a comrade ; a well-schooled thief, who bowed to the detectives and greeted them affably. This fellow helped her mind away from the exciting train of thought to which she had been led. He was an amusing rogue. 'Look at my thumbs, gentlemen,' he said ; 'you will find new marks upon them since I was here before. They are marks of the jemmy. Do not forget that I put you up to it. You will say something for me, gentlemen, and when I come out I will send you the drawing-room clock.

Ah, you do not want the drawing-room clock
Cré nom—I have no luck.'

They took the fellow away to a cell ; and when another spell of waiting had passed, the inspector returned to the little room wherein Féo was sitting. He found her with her head buried in her arms, fast asleep.

'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'this is a hard bed. Your English friend is here, and we are going to send you back with him.'

She awoke with a start, and saw, behind the Frenchman, the burly figure and good-humoured face of her friend, Leslie Drummond.

'Leslie!' she cried, holding out both her hands to him, 'I knew you would come.'

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE RUE AUBER

HE had brought a cab to the Préfecture, and he led her toward it without a word. Dawn glimmered in the sky then, and a weird, grey light of day began to war with the street lamps and to shame them. The morning air was sharp and chill, and she shivered when it blew upon her face.

'I thought you might be cold, so I brought a second coat,' was Leslie's first remark as he opened the door of the cab. 'It's a beautiful thing in Scotch plaids, and always gets a rise out of the busmen. I say, Féo, I was surprised.'

He shut the door, and began to wrap her up in the great Scotch coat. She could see that he had put on his own clothes anyhow, and that he wore an old Cambridge scarf about his neck in lieu of a collar. There had been a certain constraint of the situation while the inspector listened to them; and, even afterwards, she hesitated to tell her story.

'You were surprised, of course, Leslie?'

'Surprised—well, it was a little sudden. I'd

been dreaming about you, Féo, and we were going, heaven knows where together. Then we got into a railway carriage, and a man began to bang on the roof with a stick. It was the fellow at the hotel trying to call me.'

She became grave.

'What ridiculous things dreams are! Of course I sent to you because I was in trouble. There is no one else in Paris who would help me. I knew that you would.'

'That's taken for granted. Why am I in Paris at all, if it is not to help you? And you're going to tell me all about it—from the first line to the last. I haven't much of a top-knot, Féo; but I think that I could weather those Austrian chaps if it came to it. I'll try, anyway.'

He spoke very simply; and followed too sound a code of honour to permit himself to utter even a word to his own advantage. Nor did that aspect of their meeting occur to her. A woman, who loves, is ever incapable of viewing her actions in any other light than that of her own happiness. Leslie would help her because he was her friend. He knew that she could never be more. She had told him that often. And so she related to him the whole story of her days in the Avenue Marceau, beginning with the visit of Captain Lamberg to London and ending with

her arrest on the Pont Neuf. Not until that point did he interrupt her.

‘What a complete ass!’ he exclaimed. ‘That’s like these Frenchmen; they suspect a man every time he sneezes. Why didn’t you come straight to my hotel?’

‘At two o’clock in the morning? My dear Leslie—and, besides, they might have followed me there.’

He turned with a look of surprise, and forgot to laugh at the idea of the *sergent de ville* arresting her. Her words frightened him. He said that the danger was as great now as when she stood in the Préfecture. And no sooner did he understand the possibility of pursuit than he let down the window, and began to bawl a new direction to the cabman, who pulled up abruptly, being unable to comprehend a word of the tongue which Eton had taught her sons and had called French.

‘Tell him, Féo. These cabmen are all fools. They don’t understand plain English. Tell him not to go back to the Chatam. I was an idiot to suggest it. They’ll inquire there, of course. Don’t you see that your father is capable of appealing to the police. Tell the man to drive to a railway station—the Gare St. Lazare; anywhere, if it isn’t to my place.’

She gave the direction, and the cab rolled on. A hundred yards from the Rue du Louvre they passed another carriage driving at a gallop towards the Préfecture they had left; and as it passed, Féo recognised her father. Her face was very white and drawn when next she spoke.

'You came just in time,' she said quietly. 'In any case, I should not have seen him; at least, there is no law which would have compelled me to return to his house.'

'There can't be. If it comes to that, I'll drive you straight to the Embassy and tell your story. It would be a safe course, though I don't suppose you'd see it in that light.'

'You mean that it would keep me from Jerome?'

'Naturally it would. Our people couldn't help telling the Austrians what was going on, and your friend would be back in Vienna to-morrow night. That won't do, eh, Féo?'

He turned a pair of wistful eyes upon her, but she would not look into his face.

'You are very generous, Leslie,' she said. 'Of course I must find Prince Jerome to-day. He has come from Vienna to see me. I promised him that I would go to him whenever he sent for me, and that is a promise I cannot break.'

'You shall not break it if I can do anything

to help you. But we shall have hard work, for they'll watch him night and day. The question is, what are we going to do until decent people are up again? Do you know that it's just four o'clock?'

She smiled for the first time since they left the Conciergerie.

'I never thought that you and I would be driving about Paris at four o'clock in the morning,' he said frankly. 'Do you think that you can keep awake until breakfast time? I'm sure that I can't.'

'But we must, Féo. It's just a case of hunt the slipper. Those people will follow us all over Paris. I shouldn't wonder if the police helped them. We've got to depend upon our wits and to play the game. If we went back to the Chatam now, your father would be there before the chamber-maids were up. He's clever enough, and he's sure to remember me. The thing to do is to dodge them until I can send a line to your Austrian friend. I shall do that myself.'

Again he turned his questioning eyes upon her, but again she avoided them. She dared not, would not speak a word which might give him greater hope of their friendship than the past had justified.

'It was clever to think of a railway station,

Leslie. They would go to the Gare du Nord if they went anywhere. Prince Jerome is at the Hôtel Vendôme, I believe. It would not be difficult to send a message there.'

'Meanwhile you haven't been to bed, and must be dying for an hour's sleep. I'll tell you what—we'll go to the first café we see open, and I'll ask the man to let you lie down. That's one of those brilliantly commonplace notions which need a philosopher to discover. There's the very place over by the lamp there.'

They were in the Rue Auber at the moment, almost at the doors of a small café in whose porch there stood a sleepy waiter, and at whose tables sat three or four shabby people taking their morning coffee. All stared sharply at the immense Englishman and the graceful girl, who accompanied him to one of the little tables at the farthest end of the long room. Wan light of down-turned lamps illumined the place, and hid its shabbiness from the searching gleam of dawn. Leslie congratulated himself as he offered Féo a chair and beckoned the now active waiter.

'Madame and I are just arrived from Geneva. We leave for London this afternoon.'

The man shrugged his shoulders. He did not understand a word of it. Leslie looked angrily at Féo, who refused to be serious.

'That's a fine piece of imagination wasted, anyway,' said he. 'You'd better try your hand at it, Féo. Tell him we're in from Geneva, and ask if you can stop here while I go and do some business somewhere. Don't look as if you didn't believe a word of it. Incredulity is catching.'

Féo turned to the waiter and asked if she could have a room. The man told himself already that here was a young English couple upon a honeymoon; and he was all civility.

'Certainly. Madame could have an apartment while monsieur went to the city. Meanwhile, the coffee was hot—better coffee than you could get at the Gare, and no bad money. They always gave the English people bad money at the Gare because the English people were generally in a hurry. Undoubtedly they were great thieves there. Madame should be served on the instant.'

He was off with a surprising display of agility, and back again with steaming coffee and crisp new bread and creamy butter before Féo had unbuttoned her gloves. Leslie occupied himself staring blankly at the deserted street without. He did not like to tell Féo that he feared her father had seen them; nor would he confess his own fears for her success. Any minute, he said, might bring the police or the Austrian to

the door. It was more exciting than a close finish at Henley, for there you played an honest game; while here—well, he could not so much as estimate the daring and the resources and the pitilessness of those who waged the war against the brave girl he had sworn to befriend.

‘I don’t suppose they’ll look for us in the Rue Auber, wherever else they go,’ he said, with an honest effort to console her; ‘if we can only get twelve hours to ourselves, the rest would be easy. I’d better run round to the Hôtel Vendôme as soon as it’s decent to turn up there. If you’ll write what you want to say, I’ll see that the man delivers the letter. After that, it is between you and your friend.’

The note of sorrowful resignation made his voice quaver. He was not an emotional man; but this love of his had become the mainstay of his life. To surrender Féo, the Féo who had seemed to him the one woman in all the world, who was at once his ideal of beauty, of gentleness, and of woman’s nobility, implied a sacrifice greater than he dared to contemplate. The fact that she thanked him so earnestly, so prettily, was the ultimate irony of that encounter.

‘I could never be grateful enough, Leslie,’ she said, with a great tenderness in her voice. ‘If I can only see Jerome, I don’t care what comes

after. My father is a coward, and will only dare what others dare for him. Captain Lamberg is a man whom a woman might fear. But I should not fear him if Jerome knew.'

'He shall know in an hour at the latest. Meanwhile, if Providence would only send that Austrian scoundrel my way, I'd give him a token of your regard he wouldn't forget for a month. Those mincing dandies in gold buttons and blue trousers are all the same. They're too polite when it suits them; and when it doesn't suit them, they prate about honour and other nonsense. The truth is that they haven't got enough honour amongst them to fill a saltspoon.'

'You misjudge the Austrians,' she protested. 'They are the politest nation in Europe; I think that they are also one of the best. Jerome is the soul of honour. The best proof is that he is in Paris now.'

'And that I am going to see him. Well, Féo, if you are happy, what can I say?'

'You can say that I shall never forget.'

He shrugged his shoulders, and rose from the table. It was six o'clock then, and he had determined to go to the Hôtel Vendôme at the earliest possible moment, lest others should be before him. Féo, in turn, would not hear of the room nor of the rest he wished her to take.

'How could I sleep?' she asked. 'I shall count the minutes until you bring me news.'

'Then you shan't count many if I can help it. Good-bye, Féo.'

He just touched her hand and left the café quickly.

She remembered afterwards that he did not look round or make any sign as he passed into the street. When he was gone, the waiter brought her the morning papers; but she had neither the will nor the desire to read them. Every footstep upon the pavement excited her strangely. She knew that a hundred chances might betray her secret, both to her father and to the police. The idea that these enemies of hers were awake and busy in their desire to draw this net about her quickened her faculties and hardened her resolve. She had a woman's wit, and she would use it to cut the meshes of the net and to secure her freedom. And in this sense she was glad to be alone, to depend upon her own heart and courage. She would see Jerome, would see him that day—if—if—ah, if!

And so she watched the city waking, the gathering crowds upon the pavements, the waxing life of the new day, the ripening glory of the summer morning. Minute by minute the voice of Paris intensified. Shopmen began to take

down their shutters ; cabs rolled by to the Gare ; the *pompier*s, who cleaned the streets, were busy with their hoses ; hurrying people passed in and out of the cafés ; the morning papers came, in untidy bundles, to the kiosks ; the railway station echoed with the shriek of whistles and the clamour of arriving trains. Two hours passed whilst she tried to concern herself with this bustling scene ; but Leslie did not return. She could not guess what disappointment kept him, nor why he forgot his promise. No possibility of misfortune there was which did not suggest itself to her. If anything had happened to Jerome ! If the Austrian had contrived that he was no longer in Paris !

She stood in her bedroom at that time, tidying her wind-blown hair and looking at the weary white face which the glass showed her. The delay was almost more than she could bear. She had the impulse to go out into the street and to walk about until the news came ; but her good sense restrained her. Leslie would come back, she was sure. He, at any rate, could have nothing to fear from those in the Avenue Marceau. Nevertheless, another hour passed and Leslie did not return. It was twelve o'clock and the summer's day was at its zenith when the ready waiter came to her room and broke that spell of doubt and of uncertainty.

'A visitor, madame—he waits below. He does not give his name.'

'It is not the Englishman who was with me this morning?'

'No, madame, it is another.'

Féo put on her hat slowly. All the blood flamed in her cheeks again. Who was the stranger who would not give his name? She knew that, if it were not Jerome, then it must be her father or Captain Lamberg. The suspense of that moment was intolerable. She went down the stairs with quick steps. Everything told her that this was the momentous hour.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUNTER-MARCH

HE stood at the foot of the stairs, with his back toward her; but he turned when he heard her step. Some good instinct told her who it was even before she saw his face. There was little sunlight in that long, windowless room; nevertheless, she could read in his eyes the welcome he wished to give her, and when her hand touched his it was as though the waiting message of those weary months had at last been spoken.

‘Jerome!’ she cried; and so stood with beating heart and flushed face.

She had dreamed of that instant a hundred times since the word of farewell was spoken in the woods by the Danube. The reality surpassed the dream, in spite of the dangers attending.

‘Féo—at last!’

Some spell seemed to have been upon him until that moment. He held her hand as in a vice; but, until the words were spoken, he did not betray the changing emotions which muted

his lips so surely. Now, however, he bent of a sudden and kissed her. His touch was as fire in her veins. She knew then that her desire to find him was no shame.

'Jerome,' she said, 'you wished it—tell me that you wished it?'

He put his arm about her as in a shielding gesture.

'As I wish my own life.'

She drew back from him with rosy face and eyes wet with tears.

'I cannot believe it,' she exclaimed; 'I cannot believe that yesterday was true.'

'I am here to convince you, Féo. That is why I left Vienna. It has been a long journey, and we have some way yet to go. But it will be easier now.'

She laughed at her very happiness.

'There is so much to tell you, Jerome—so much. I shall never begin at the beginning. And here—in this place——'

She pointed to the little tables in the front room of the café—tables now tenanted by clerks and poor gentlemen taking their breakfasts. The oddity of their encounter amused her. That it should have been in this stuffy restaurant, in a by-street of Paris! Months ago they had planned it so differently. He was to come to her in

London, to find her in the great house which her talent had built for her.

‘Were you not surprised?’ she asked presently.

‘Not at all. I was only puzzled. When I heard that you were not in London, I knew that Lamberg had taken you to Paris. He is my father’s agent—a poor one at the best. We shall find that it is always easy to circumvent a liar. More than that, it is amusing, if you know how to handle your weapons properly. But we must choose our own ground. I quite expect that they have followed me from the hotel; and they will now have the pleasure of following me to Durand’s. You are hungry, Féo?’

He spoke with a great confidence, as of one accustomed to be obeyed and refusing to hear of obstacles. Listening to him, she forgot her own doubts, and remembered only that she stood at his side again.

‘When my father knows that I have met you, he will tell your friends,’ she said; ‘you have thought of that?’

‘I have thought of many things. I cannot say that your excellent father is one of them. When we have had our breakfast, and the man, who is following me, tires of waiting on the steps of the Madeleine, we will begin to think again, Féo. The important fact is that I am hungry.’

He threw a twenty-franc piece to the waiter, and passed out of the café. A fiacre waited for him, and he held her hand while she entered it, and then seated himself fearlessly at her side. Brilliant sunshine flooded the Rue Auber. The surrounding boulevards were glittering with the fuller life of the day. She could not realise the change that a few hours had wrought, but was conscious of an enduring excitement as of uncertainty made certain, and a finality which she had never known before.

'You are sure that they followed you, Jerome?'

'Quite sure. There is the fellow in that yellow-wheeled cab behind us. He has been following me ever since I came to Paris. He will have fine news for the Embassy to-night. If it were any one else, all sorts of things would happen. Possibly they will even try to get me out of Paris—after I have left. You see, I don't want to be unkind to them, and, since they desire very much that I should leave, I am going by the eight o'clock train to-night.'

Her face clouded. That shadow of doubt and danger again loomed before her. Her momentary sense of happiness was swift to pass. They were two children playing. She must forget the game.

'You are quite right to go,' she said ; 'I could not let you suffer this indignity for my sake. I meant to tell you so, when I asked Mr. Drummond to go to your hotel this morning.'

He took her hand in his and pressed it.

'I like your English friend,' he said ; 'we need men of his stamp in Austria. I have always thought that I should like to be an Englishman for your sake, Féo. But you will teach me. And, after all, there is no nationality in love.'

'Leslie has been very good to me,' she exclaimed. 'I am glad that he is in Paris, after what has happened. When you have gone to-night, I shall be quite alone here.'

He laughed at the completeness of her plan.

'And to-morrow—to-morrow, little pessimist?'

She rested her chin in her hand.

'To-morrow you will be in the train for Vienna, and I shall be in London.'

The fiacre drove up to Durand's as she spoke, and he sprang to the pavement and took both her hands as she alighted. The other cab, the one with the yellow wheels, stopped some little way from the café, and a smartly dressed man followed them to the door of the restaurant.

'You see,' said Jerome, 'the fellow is there, sure enough. He is anxious to know what we are going to have for breakfast. He will send a

telegram to my father just now, and my father will answer in a passion, exhorting them to more zeal. He is splendidly energetic, my father. By and by, he will protest to all the world that he wished you to be my wife. That will be when we have played all the cards, and I hold the last of them. As I said, it's an amusing game if you play it properly.'

He turned and entered the café. To Féo, the scene was as one in some drama—an exciting scene which would be changed presently to give place to other pictures and new faces—the faces of her father and of Lamberg, and even of the men she had seen in the old house in the Avenue Marceau. She was conscious of nothing but the present. The morrow, the future, the farewell which must be spoken by and by, were in no way to be realised. She sat at the little table, and ate of the dishes, and heard the buzz of talk as one who acts and listens in the waking moments of a dream. But Jerome chattered unceasingly. His fine figure, his flaxen hair, his suave manners, coloured with the fine courtesy of the Austrian, could not escape remark. His very presence seemed to typify another atmosphere—the atmosphere of court and palace, and the stately homes of Europe.

'Come' he said, 'the story which was to begin

at the beginning? That would be a long time ago, Féo. Do you remember the day when I met you in Richter's house? I went home that night and told my father that I was going to marry you. He was very much amused, and talked of nothing else for three days. On the morning of the fourth day, he discovered that I was in earnest. Nobody saw him for a week after that. We used to play a little tragedy every night, all to ourselves. He would have made a splendid actor—my father. Do not think that I am not very fond of him. If one is to have one's own way in life, something is to be granted to the opposition—a little temper, some fine moral maxims, and the old platitudes about family and state, and all that nonsense. When I told him that I had found a wife, he struck an attitude, and reminded me that I was a Hapsburg. I reminded him, in turn, that our family had made a large number of unfortunate marriages, and that a little respectability would really be very refreshing. He answered that I was no son of his. I confessed surprise—it was very natural. When he contrived to have me sent to Croatia, I went readily. That allowed something to him. The same law applies to this business in Paris. He thinks that he has locked you up in the Avenue Marceau, and he is

pluming himself on his cleverness. He will send an announcement directly to the Austrian papers, betrothing me to my cousin, Princess Marie. I have told her already that I have not the slightest intention of marrying her, so there is no risk of complications. When my father has done other things—to satisfy his love of authority—he will come to me repentant. He will declare that I have the most charming wife in the world, and will bless us with tears in his eyes. He has done that to other people often.'

Féo smiled in spite of herself. This flippant talk concerned that 'might be' which had been the dream of such long months. Minute by minute she sought to convince herself that his road lay to Vienna, hers to London; but the arguments were not to be marshalled.

'Captain Lamberg came to our house nearly a month ago. I did not know why he came, or I could not have accompanied him to Paris. You understand that, Jerome?'

'Of course I do. Your place was in London as long as I was there. You owed that to your promise.'

She laughed at his conception of it.

'Perhaps, if I had remembered it. I was thinking of something else. There are certain things a woman cannot do if she has any self-respect.'

He crossed his arms upon the table and looked at her masterfully.

'Féo, you are talking nonsense. When a woman has promised to be a man's wife, there is no longer any question of self-respect to be considered. I would have come to you sooner or later, if I had walked to Calais and arrived in London with no soles to my boots. Eighteen months ago, in Vienna, you had the right to say to me: "I will" or "I will not." When you said "I will," you ended the matter. I told you that nothing short of my own death would keep me from your side. You, it seems, are frightened already because a few ridiculous people try to concern themselves with our affairs. We are both of age; we thrashed out all the arguments last year; why should we begin again, especially at this moment when a gentleman is waiting outside to know what we are having for breakfast? Is it not quite enough to remember that I must get you out of Paris to-night, and that, if I do not, several very awkward things may happen? Be sensible, my dear girl; I can't think of everything at once. Let that clever little head of yours help me.'

There was a convincing note in his voice which she could not resist. It had ever been so. She had not wished, even in Vienna, to put this

burden of her promise upon him; but his will had won the victory. She knew that he loved her with a strong man's love, and against that her heart was impotent.

'What can I advise you to do?' she protested. 'My father must have told his story already at your Embassy. I cannot leave Paris with you alone. You would not ask me to do that? And how is a woman to escape when the police will not let her?'

He lit a cigarette and stirred his coffee.

'If I had wished you to leave Paris with me, and to compromise your name by doing anything so foolish, I should not be in Durand's at this moment. You need not have mentioned it, for it was quite out of the question. As for my Embassy, or the police, I do not care a straw for either of them. My father knows me by this name—or he should know me. The fortress treatment does not suit my constitution. I have told him so. On the day when he takes any serious step against me I will answer him in the only way a man of honour can answer—the sacrifice of his life. I threatened him with that in Vienna a year ago. He knows that I mean what I say, and so his weapons are turned, not against me, but against you. Otto Lamberg would do any dirty work for a bank-

note. You have had the best of the first encounter; but he won't let the matter rest there. Yesterday he was comparatively harmless; to-day he will be dangerous. That is why we are going to leave Paris without any loss of time. I don't believe they'd go so far as to arrest you, or any of that nonsense; but it's better to have the danger at your back, and that's where I shall leave it.'

She laughed, with just a suggestion of irony.

'How easy it is to talk of things!' she said. 'We have only to say "up," and we fly like the pigs. To-night I shall catch the train to London; you will go back to Vienna. In a week's time I shall be reading of your betrothal to your cousin.'

Her face clouded at the thought. All the glitter about her, the shimmering gowns, the nodding plumes, the bright figures were obscured as by a veil cast suddenly upon her face. But Jerome continued to talk unemotionally, as though of the most trivial affairs.

'Féo,' he said, 'be sensible. You know perfectly well that you will not do anything so silly. The train which you will catch is the afternoon train to Pontarlier. I shall drive you to the Gare de Lyon myself. When you are in the carriage and the train has started I return to

my Hôtel to read my father's angry telegram. To-morrow I shall take the morning express and be with you before dinner. In three days we shall be married. Don't contradict me, for I have made up my mind. It's a habit of mine not to change it.'

He beckoned a waiter and paid the bill. She made a pretence of arranging her hat; but her fingers trembled. The mystery, the pleasure, the uncertainty of it all thrilled her with an ecstasy of hope. She had no courage either to argue with him or to contradict him.

'Promises, promises, my dear Jerome—when you have said "good-bye" to me——'

He arose abruptly.

'There is a gentleman waiting for us on the steps of the Madeleine,' he exclaimed, without waiting to hear her. 'I am going to trespass upon the courtesy of *Monsieur le Propriétaire* and to leave his house by the back door. There is so much to see in the Madeleine, Féo. It would be a pity to disturb the man.'

She smiled in spite of her excitement. A waiter conducted them through a maze of passages, through kitchens and sculleries, until they emerged at last in the Rue Duphot. A closed carriage was waiting there. He opened the door quietly and waited for her to enter.

'We have not too much time,' he said, 'for the old lady detests waiting.'

'The old lady?'

'Certainly, my friend the Comtesse de Berge. You are going to her house, Féo.'

CHAPTER XV

A STRANGE FAREWELL

SHE heard him without astonishment. Nothing could astonish her now. The cab rolled slowly through those very streets she had trodden so wearily last night. A great desire to sleep and awake when all this doubt and perplexity had passed away warred upon her curiosity. A new world was opening to her. She had buried the old life when she fled from the Avenue Marceau, and confessed that she was alone in the world. The man, in his turn, sat holding her hand very tightly. It was something to know that he had found her at last.

'We have not too much time,' he repeated, 'for the Countess makes a point of being at the station an hour before the train starts. She is the oddest woman in all Paris, or in all France for that matter. If you told her that a marriage was to be made or marred, she would cross Europe to have a hand in the work. Her château at Pontarlier is the very place for us. I don't

suppose there will be any one at the railway station; and when you have left Paris and they find that I stay behind, we shall amuse them. I planned it all out yesterday. That's why you didn't hear of me before. I made up my mind not to meet Lamberg on his own ground. That sort of man is accustomed to the dark. He will begin to look for us when the lamps are lighted. A little honesty is the last thing he expects. I should like to see his face if any one told him that we were driving through Paris in broad daylight. Rogues never understand why a man throws down his cards—and the old lady is our best card. I wonder how you'll like her, Féo?'

She did not answer the question.

'Where does your friend live?' she asked.

'At the Château de Joux above Pontarlier. It is one of the finest seats in France. You will meet all sorts of people there—chiefly good, but some indifferent. The last are the people the old lady desires to marry.'

'A compliment to me!'

'Certainly—a compliment. You are the exception to her rule. If she likes you—and she cannot help that—she will protect you against the law of three kingdoms. She is sixty-two years of age. If any one proposed to her to-

morrow, and offered to run away with her in a post-chaise, she would go. A secret marriage is a *bonne bouche* to her, and we are her benefactors. She will be ten years younger to-morrow.'

Féo sighed. There were tears in her eyes.

'I don't know what to say,' she exclaimed. 'I have no right to be here at all. How can I go to a stranger's house?'

'You can go by the three o'clock train, Féo.'

'And be the scorn of every one?'

'The scorn. What an idea! Here is one of my friends who sends you an invitation to stay at her house. Are you ashamed of my friendship?'

'But I have no clothes, no money. I haven't a single dress; I can't go, Jerome.'

He saw that her distress was very real, and he put his arm about her and drew her head down upon his shoulder.

'Little Féo,' he said, 'there are many people trying to separate us. You are now among the number. But they will all fail, and you will fail with them. Don't you understand why?'

She understood.

'You love me,' she said.

'The first and last reason. There is nothing else in my life but your love. Remember that always, and everything will be easy.'

She raised a smiling face to his.

'I will remember it always.'

He kissed her lips, and then forgetting his sentiment, began to be practical again.

'It's awkward about the dresses, but the Countess understands, and she insists upon buying you a wardrobe herself. I believe she would be offended if you appeared at the station with a trunk. She thinks that she is protecting us from all sorts of dangerous people, and a heroine without a dress-basket is something new for her. Don't mind her fussiness. She is always scolding somebody, but no one ever listens. I shall hope to see you to Pontarlier to-morrow, and when I come we can arrange everything.'

'I am sorry that you must remain another night in Paris.'

'Oh, but it can't be helped! I want them to think that you have gone back to London. If that fellow at the Madeleine didn't anticipate us, we have twenty-four hours' start of them at any rate. That will enable me to leave Paris without suspicion. Mr. Drummond, your English friend, has promised to do everything he can. The police will report your return to his hotel. That is so much dust thrown in their eyes, and all that we need is time. We could be married in three days, Féo.'

She sighed.

'In three days my father could reach Pont-arlier.'

'Undoubtedly, but it would take him more than three days to find his way into the Château de Joux. Come, there is no need to look on the darker side. Here's the Gare. I don't suppose we shall find a porter to carry my stick, for the Countess will be on the platform. She is always the centre of a crowd. A regiment of soldiers could not get her into the train until she had protested that the country is lost—together with her black basket and her jewel-case. Ah, I thought so.'

He paid the cabman and passed quickly to the Bureau. A group of heterogeneous idlers—workmen, boys, officials—was here formed about a little old lady, whose high-pitched voice rang through the station in a discordant note of anger and defiance. Short, with flowing skirts of black silk, and hair in abundance, dressed high upon her forehead in the fashion of the last century; painted, powdered, rouged—Féo said that this must be the Countess of Berge. A moment later the old lady was kissing her upon both cheeks.'

'My poor, persecuted child, you have come, then. And you, Prince. Ah! you remember a lonely old woman when you think that you can

make use of her. But I am glad to see you. They are all thieves and robbers here. They have stolen my valise—a brown valise with black straps. You will find it for me, my dear? Ah, the pity of being a lonely old woman.'

She turned again to exhort the porters to new zeal; and when her bag had been found, and she had taken out her purse three times to see that she had the tickets, and a footman had been sent back to her carriage to make sure that nothing was left behind, the procession set out towards the *coupé* reserved for her.

'So, my dear, those dreadful men have let you out of prison, then. Not a word, not a word; we should be overheard here. Count upon my discretion. I am an old woman, and have learned how to be discreet. Where is Aphrodite? the good God help me, where is Aphrodite?'

She was about to enter the carriage when she made the discovery that her dog was not under her arm as usual. Instantly the porters were set running again. An inspector mopped his brow and protested before heaven that it was not his fault. Maids wept under the fierce torrent of anger outpoured. Footmen wrangled with footmen; the old lady herself stood at the door of the *coupé* and solemnly called the people to witness that, though the Republic should fall, she would

not leave the Gare de Lyon until Aphrodite was found. The crisis was at its height when a whine from the interior of the *coupé* terminated the scene. The dog was in the carriage after all, then.

A great climbing, assistance from the footmen, the maids tugging and hauling, the small boys mocking, the inspector anxious—and Madame was hoisted to her seat. Again she counted the bundles, again she looked at her tickets. All was well. She would permit the train to start.

‘Until to-morrow, then. Oh, I shall take care of her, don’t be afraid! Let them come to me if they have anything to say. You are sure that my luggage is in the van, Prince?’

Jerome smiled.

‘My dear Countess, there are two of your footmen counting it at this moment.’

‘Ah, but one cannot trust the servants. I am robbed every day—I have been robbed for twenty years, and still I suffer it. You will not fail us to-morrow, Prince?’

‘Of course I shall not fail you. Am I not giving you a hostage?’

For the first time Madame smiled.

‘I believe that you are in love with her,’ she said. ‘Foolish children, as if love ever did anything for any one.’

Jerome bent and kissed her hand.

'Adorable creature,' he said, 'I will not argue with you.'

Madame nodded her head sagaciously and looked at Féo.

'She is very pretty, the little one,' she exclaimed. 'I shall find a husband for her.'

She was about to assure them that if the brown valise were in the van, which she doubted, it would certainly be lost at Dijon, when the guard blew his tin trumpet, and the heavy train moved slowly out of the Gare. Féo saw Jerome for an instant as he stood, erect and smiling, upon the last plank of the platform. It was a strange farewell, she thought. His final word had been a promise that he would come to her to-morrow. She asked herself if destiny willed such a meeting, or if she had indeed heard his voice and touched his hand for the last time? Nevertheless, a sense of rest came to her as she leaned back against the soft cushions of that luxurious carriage. She almost dared to hope that her journey would carry her to some place where the past might be forgotten and the future be her recompense. The moral of her act was not to be debated. Jerome loved her, and in his love her vindication lay.

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE CHÂTEAU DE JOUX

FÉO awoke very early on the morning of the following day. She did not at first remember where she was ; and the unfamiliar room, so large, so splendid, and so strange, by no means helped her memory. She had never seen a bed like the bed in which she lay. Its fantastic carvings, its hangings of tapestry wherefrom hideous faces leered at her, its splendid lace and linen, reminded her of the great beds she had laughed at in the Exhibitions in London. Everywhere about her were emblems of wealth and of the rarest taste. A Sèvres clock with a jewelled pendulum stood upon a mantelshelf of the whitest marble, in turn supported by Caryatides. The candlesticks were alabaster figures bearing quaint torches. Wardrobes, which would have held the clothes of a household, stood cheek by jowl with writing-tables of Buhl work and cabinets beyond price. Féo remembered that she had no clothes, and the wardrobes amused her. She was thor-

oughly awake now, and she began to recall the events of yesterday. The journey from Paris, the nervous, fidgety, chattering old lady who had been her chaperon, the descent at Pontarlier, the drive through the hills to the château in the Jura mountains, the solemn function of dinner, the old lady's command that she should go to bed, the room in which she lay, and, after that, oblivion. A strange day, she thought. Yet what of the day to come?

She did not know what time it was, for her watch had stopped at four o'clock a year ago, and she had never wound it since. No sounds came to her from the great house; but in the fields without she heard the harvesters singing. The sunlight, which shone generously in that room, seemed to reproach her for her tardiness. When she drew aside a curtain and looked out from one of the windows which gave upon the valley, she thought that she had never seen so fair a country. Far below was the road to that Paris she had left. A little river flashed back the sun's rays as from a jewelled mirror. The town of Pontarlier was to be discerned as a loom of smoke upon the horizon. Elsewhere the green mountains towered up to be sentinels of the house. It were as though she stood upon the edge of a precipice and could overlook some

splendid scene of field and forest, spread out beyond the capacity of her wondering eyes. Upon the verandah, which girdled the first floor of the château, flowers blossoming gave perfume to the sweet air of the morning. She could espy the gardeners working upon the Italian terraces below. A glitter of scarlet and gold and white bore testimony to the work they did. But it was the distant view, the picture of la belle France, so green, so fair, so full of that suggestion of peace passing understanding, which appealed most surely to her imagination. Here truly was there a haven for her—here, indeed, could she find a home when Jerome came.

An excitement, born of her pleasure, compelled her to dress swiftly. She remembered, while she dressed, that Jerome was to leave Paris that afternoon, and to reach the château in time for dinner. His assurance that, whatever might be contrived against her, he, at least, would remain a free agent, helped her to confidence. She was among strangers, but her solitude would be brief. The eccentric old lady, who was the mistress of the château, had won her confidence already. Féo read the truer human qualities beneath that mask of nervous complaint and unceasing peevishness. She believed that she had found a friend. No longer did she hear

a voice telling her that she was alone in the world. Here, at least, was one wise head, which could lead her to the path she rightly must follow. That very day the Countess should know her story from the first line to the last. This promise of confession was very pleasing to her. She told herself that she would not delay even an hour, lest Jerome returned to prevail above her resolution. And she had just taken this resolve when the door of her bedroom swung back violently, and a young girl, prettily dressed in white and carrying a white sun-bonnet in her hands, came headlong into the apartment. She was breathless, and her cheeks were flushed. But she put her arms about Féo's neck, and kissed her upon both cheeks.

'Féo, Féo,' she cried, 'I am Victorine—you will let me love you, Féo?'

Féo, unaccustomed to such ardour, yet won by the girl's sincerity, answered laughingly—

'And who is Victorine that I should let her love me?'

The new comer stared in amazement.

'She has not told you, then! Ah, but she is always selfish. If I were a dog—but I am only Victorine.'

'You are a relative of hers, dear?'

'I am her niece; I live here always and never go

to Paris. People ask me, but my aunt says, "No." That is for by and by when all the men have grey hair, and I am old, so old that I shall carry a pug dog under my arm. Some day all this will be mine, all that you can see—the grounds, the park, the house, and the statue with the broken nose in the garden down there. What is the good of it all when they leave you alone, and all the men you like are in Paris? But it will be different now that you are here. You will tell me about everything, Féo—you will be my friend.'

She sat upon the bed, swinging her old bonnet, and looking the very type of radiant health and happiness. Féo said that she would be not twenty. Her own life had shown to her so few of those things which go to make a young girl's pleasure that she welcomed this impulsive friendship. The sweet, fresh voice was a pleasing note of the morning.

'You must tell me everything, show me everything, Victorine,' she said; 'we shall have time to-day, for Jerome is not coming until seven o'clock. And, of course, I am such a stranger.'

Victorine sprang up and linked her arm about the other's waist.

'Let us have breakfast in the garden,' she exclaimed earnestly. 'Aunt thinks that she is ill and has sent for the doctor. I will tell him to

keep her in bed to-day, and then we shall not be bothered. It is splendid in the garden; if it were not for that, I should run away with the little boy who serves the altar. You don't know what it is to be a prisoner, when all the people you like are in Paris.'

'There are so many of them, then?'

Victorine sighed.

'There is Paul—ah, if you knew Paul! He is in the Hussars—he was here a year ago, and I have his picture. We went for such walks. Aunt used to be shocked every day. She threatened to send me to the convent. Paul said that he knew a good convent in Paris, but *ma tante* would not hear of it. That is the worst of being old. You never like other people to do the things you used to do. If I were to run away with some one I hate, she would say I was her own child. But just because it is Paul——'

She pouted prettily, and led Féo down the great staircase with the gilded balustrade, out through houses of glass wherein countless blossoms scented the air, to the old Italian garden and the umbrageous walks and bowers there. It was all very still and silent, and full of the suggestion of a world apart—the world of old France, and of a generation, noble in a tradition of nobility, which long since had passed away. To Féo, it was as

some revelation of an unknown life. Dimly, through the years, she had dreamed of such a home as this, of a high place which should be hers by right of her gifts and her attainment. The reality awed her. She dared not remember that, if she were Jerome's wife, the years that remained to her must be passed in such an atmosphere as this. She must school herself to the habits, the manner, the fine tradition which in itself gave nobility to the Château de Joux.

They breakfasted in an arbour overlooking the valley. Two footmen waited upon them with a method lacking ostentation yet all-sufficient. Masses of wild roses clung about the arbour; the parterres around were a blaze of warm colour and of rich blossoms. Down upon the pastures, the harvesters drove lazy horses to their leisured labours. Distant bells spoke of the droning life, and of the dreamy hamlets. The old château itself appeared to sleep in the fostering sunshine. Féo could not believe that yesterday she was in Paris, harassed, alone, desperate. The stream of her perplexity had turned, and seemed to be carrying her out to some placid sea of happiness and content. If Jerome kept his promise!

'They told you that I was coming, Victorine?' she asked.

'My aunt sent a telegram to Félix, the steward. She said that I was not to see it. He showed it

to me when I wouldn't believe him. When you came last night, *ma tante* said that it was a matter of life and death. She wanted to guard all the gates, so that no one should come in. I have never seen her so pleased. She tries to believe that they will send you to some dreadful place—she said the Bastille, until I told her that it was pulled down. And I was so sorry, Féo. If it had been my Paul!

'You are engaged to him, then, Victorine?'

Victorine flushed.

'He said that I was to let him know when I was in Paris. He promised to send me a book for the New Year; but I believe aunt kept it. She is a jealous old thing, and I know she liked Paul. I don't want her to die, but she never lets me go to Paris. You are lucky, because she likes Jerome. She has made up her mind that you shall marry him; and when she says that, it's as good as done. If I pretended to hate Paul, she would be different. But I can't do that—one can't pretend when one is very fond of any one. Won't you tell me your story? It's different for you. You have run away from somewhere, and *ma tante* says she loves you. How happy you must be, Féo!'

Féo smiled. 'You are all so kind to me—I must be happy.'

'And won't you tell me your story?'

'There is no story. I like some one very much, and other people say that I must not like him. They tried to keep us apart by shutting me up in an old house in Paris. I got out of the window, and here I am.'

Victorine stared with her pretty eyes very wide open.

'Was he waiting for you when you opened the window?'

'Not exactly, dear.'

'You drove off in a carriage and pair?'

'No, I ran away; just like any one going out for a walk.'

Victorine sighed.

'And he is coming here to-night. Aunt says you are to be married on Monday. If it were my Paul——'

'Who was going to marry me?'

Victorine jumped up impulsively.

'I should hate you,' she said. 'Let us go and tell aunt that we have had our breakfast in the garden. That will make her cross. And—oh, I forgot! The costumier is coming from Pontarlier. You are to have dresses, hats—everything. I will show you my pink dress, and you shall have one like it. They will take us for sisters. Don't you wish that we were sisters, Féo?'

Her affection for her new friend was pretty

and sincere. They entered the old house arm in arm, and began to walk through its great galleries and Empire rooms. In the boudoir, where Victorine passed so many long hours, a piano was open. Féo had not sung a note since she left London; but now, upon an impulse, she sat down at the piano and began to sing the music of *Faust*. Victorine listened entranced. She had never heard such music or such a singer. The full notes flooded the room with enchanting harmonies, which could play upon the passions as upon some answering instrument. The listening child was transported, as in her lover's arms, to new scenes and magic cities. When Féo ceased, she was kneeling still at the piano, but her eyes were very wide open, and she did not speak.

'La belle Patti—la belle Patti—ah, my dear, whom, then, have I taken to my heart?'

Féo turned quickly. Madame la Comtesse, rouged, powdered, her hands upraised in a dramatic attitude, her eyes sparkling above their circles of black, was at her elbow.

'My child,' she said, 'you are a genius; I will certainly find a husband for you.'

CHAPTER XVII

THE EMPTY CARRIAGE

THE costumier came from Pontarlier at two o'clock with brocades and silks and muslins, and solemn protestations that there was no woman in France with madame's taste; and the assurance, oft repeated, that he had never been called upon to fit so graceful a figure as Féo's. The old lady heard him impatiently, and then began to scold him. She had just come from Paris, and she knew! Some of these things had been worn last year! What did he mean by bringing them to her house? Was it because he thought her an old woman who had forgotten the mode? She would undeceive him. He should never darken her doors again. This was to be an event in his life. He must dress mademoiselle as he had never dressed any one before. As for those wretched things, he had better take them away and burn them.

Féo saw the rich stuffs outspread, and thought of her little wardrobe at home. Her father's

selfishness had kept her always to the practice of rigid economy, and to that indispensable friend of the poor—the black gown. Often she had spent no more than twenty pounds in a whole year; but here were dresses which could not have been purchased for twice that sum. The nature of such generosity frightened her. She seemed to be piling up obligations which she might never repay.

‘You are so good; but I could not, I dare not accept these things,’ she said timorously, as she turned the brocades in her hand, and experienced a woman’s joy in the treasures outspread before her. But the old lady would not hear of it.

‘He is my boy,’ she answered decisively; ‘I knew him in Vienna when he was a baby. Don’t forget that you are a Berthier, child. There is no better name in France. Your father should be ashamed of himself if he has not taught you that. These Austrians, who are so stupid in Paris, will find it out by and by. I shall go and see them when you are married. The Archduke thinks he is very clever, but he is not clever at all. He has matched himself against a poor old woman, and she has won. I shall tell him that pink is your colour. It was mine when I was your age; but we change, dear. Even the pretty ones must grow old some day.’

She sat with a length of golden brocade upon her lap; and it was plain that the colour could carry her mind back to some forgotten day when the Court of the Empire had known the name of Julienne, Comtesse de Berge, and many a *salon* had sought her favour. The mood passed swiftly, however. Such impulse as intrigue could give to her waning life was hers now. She delighted in this adventure. She would marry this boy and girl in her house, and go to Vienna to tell the story.

'Jerome has a will of his own, and he wants you, dear. If you do not marry him, he will go and do something foolish—ah, the dear fellows who go and do something foolish! We must save him from himself—we must marry him. I know Jerome. The Archduke knows him, too. There are sons to whom you can say, "This is right or this is wrong." Jerome is not one of them. They are unwise to try and separate you, little girl. They will never do it—never—never.'

The conviction seemed to please her. She fell to scolding the costumier again; and when she had tried every imaginable shade, holding the strips against Féo's pretty hair, and covering her with fragments of silk and muslin, she took the man apart to give him his orders. Féo could protest no more. The mystery, nay, the miracle

of it all was beyond her understanding. Yesterday she had been homeless and alone. To-day she enjoyed the friendship of one of the richest women in France; she was free of that house; the subtle atmosphere of nobility and tradition won upon her ambitions, and satisfied the dreams of her childhood.

'How can I thank the Countess! how can I tell her that I have no right to all this kindness!' she exclaimed when she was alone with Victorine again; but Victorine was radiant with delight.

'She likes you because other people are hateful,' she said. 'If you had not been locked up in that dreadful house in Paris, she wouldn't care a bit. That's why I call her a selfish old thing. If some one would lock up Paul, she would be kind to him. When you are married you will ask Paul to your house, and I shall be there. If it were Monday for me, Féo!'

Féo shook her head. 'I can't think about it,' she said, 'so much might happen. If Jerome comes to-night, I shall really begin to hope. Isn't it a very long day, Victorine? To me it seems a year.'

'Because you are waiting for him. Let us drive through the woods, and I will show you

where Paul and I went picnicking. He promised to write and tell me that he would be here again in June—but aunt must have burned the letter. Ah, Féo, when one is waiting for a letter!’

She sighed pitifully ; but the depression was of the instant, and soon she was scampering, with her dogs, away to the stables for her ponies. Madame la Comtesse came out to the steps of the house to see them off, and to exhort Féo to punctuality.

‘He will arrive at seven o’clock, dear, and will expect to find you at the gate. My word—how many times I have waited at the gate! And he will have such stories for us. Do not let Victorine make your head ache with her silly chatter. You must look your best to-night—your very best, my poor child.’

Féo laughed. ‘Here, at least, you cannot call me that,’ she said.

The old lady raised her finger warningly.

‘We have enemies,’ she said ; ‘we must be prudent. When they know that you are in my house, it will not be safe for you to go out at all. But to-day they will not know, and to-night my boy will be here.’

The words were ominous. Féo thought of them often as Victorine drove her through the pine

woods and found many a glade and many a bower of her romance. In spite of these new friends, her enemies remained. She recalled the gloomy house in the Avenue Marceau, the days of shame and humiliation there, her father's threats, Lamberg's subtle intriguing. Had she escaped from such dangers for ever? She scarce dared to believe in a fate so propitious. Not until Jerome came would she recall even the circumstances of those twenty hours which had carried her from Paris to this new home upon the frontier of France.

It was six o'clock when they returned to the château. Madame la Comtesse was dressing already for dinner. Victorine had a hundred things to say and do.

'You must go alone, Féo,' she said. 'If it were Paul, I should hate any one to come with me. He will be so glad to find you there. Is it not lovely to wait for any one—when you know that he must come? Oh! I saw the carriage leaving the stables as we drove up. When it is here again, you will see Jerome in it. You lucky girl—you lucky, lucky girl.'

She kissed her friend with a young girl's affection, and ran off to her own room. But Féo went slowly through the gardens to the lodge gate, wherefrom she could see the road to Pont-

arlier threading the ripe, green valley as a tape of silver. The sun still shone upon the woods; the fragrance of a June day scented the evening air; she heard the village bells, even the distant echo of a train rolling southward from Paris. But a strange gloom of the hour and the solitude troubled her in spite of all. Jerome was coming. She would see him presently—far off—upon that winding road below. He would tell her the news of the day. She would answer—she knew not what.

So she waited, restless, excited as she had rarely been, troubled with a foreboding she could not defend. Seven o'clock had long been struck upon the great clock in the stables when, at last, she espied the barouche rolling slowly toward the lodge. For some minutes her uncertainty was almost a pain. She strained her eyes; she ran a little way down the road—she returned again. It was odd, if Jerome were in the carriage, that her presence at the gate was unobserved by him. And if he had not come!

'Monsieur was not at the station, mademoiselle. There is no message. I fear we have made a mistake.'

She heard the coachman's excuse, but did not answer it. The worst had happened, then. Jerome was still in Paris. She could not imagine

what peril of their love had contrived to keep him there. Nevertheless, it seemed to her, as she stood overwhelmed by a disappointment surpassing words, that night already had come down upon the hills.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TELEGRAM

FÉO was just dressed on the following morning when Victorine came running into her bedroom with an envelope, which she waved triumphantly as a trophy of victory.

‘The telegram! the telegram! he is coming, then; he is well. Are you not glad, Féo?’

She was breathless with excitement; the wind of morning had played merry tricks with her pretty brown hair; her eyes shone with the delight of her news. When Féo took the paper with trembling fingers, and it was flattened out, and read and read again, Victorine’s arm was about her waist, and she was still unsilenced.

‘I said that it was only a mistake; you would not listen to me. I know that he is coming. *Ma tante* does not burn your letters; she burns mine. If it had been Paul, she would not have told me; but it is Jerome, and she loves him. How glad I am, Féo! how glad!’

Féo turned and kissed her. ‘He is coming,

dear ; to-morrow, if he can. Read it for yourself. I hope there is nothing else, nothing which he has been afraid to tell me.'

It was a short message, and somewhat vague. Victorine read it twice, and her ardour of gladness was a little subdued. She debated it, pouting.

'To-morrow, if prudent ; caution detains.'

Féo turned away, and went to stand at the window. There were clouds above the valley, and a mist fell upon the gardens. She was imagining a thousand things, but she would not speak of them.

'He will be here to-morrow if his friends will let him. He means to say as much. If I thought that there was anything else——'

Victorine laughed girlishly.

'It is always that way—prudence, prudence ; as if love itself were not prudence enough. Of course he will come. There are things you cannot say in a telegram. Last night I thought that it was something dreadful. I dare not tell you, Féo. But I know it's all right, now ; and I shall go and find aunt. It will make her cross——'

It was Féo's turn to laugh. 'Why should it make her cross ? Does she not wish it ?'

'She does not know what she wishes. If I

play *Faust* to her, she says it isn't *Lohengrin*. When I play *Lohengrin*, she says that I think her a poor old woman who must be made sad. She will be cross now because she promised such horrible things last night. And none of them have happened. I knew they would not. They couldn't to you, Féo.'

'We must not laugh until we are out of the wood, dear. There are twenty-four hours between us and to-morrow. You don't know how much may happen in twenty-four hours. Jerome has many enemies. I don't think he is half as much afraid of them as I am. If he would think of them a little more, I might hope for the best. But he believes that he is so strong, and that is the danger.'

She spoke as one reflecting ; and, truth to tell, that haunting shadow of doubt had pursued her through the weary night, even in her restless sleep. The magic of the change was losing its potency. After all, she was a stranger in that house. Unless Jerome came, she could not continue to claim the hospitality of these good friends of hers. That sense of indignity, which she had experienced in the Avenue Marceau, came again to destroy her dream of finality. It seemed to her that she was, unwillingly, the centre of an intrigue which verged upon vulgarity.

Until that time, episode had followed episode so swiftly that she had been unable to reflect upon the circumstances of her flight and its consequences. But now, hour by hour, she began to see the matter in its entirety, to weigh it up, to assert that self-dependence upon which she had relied almost since the days of her childhood. She said that she had erred in leaving Paris. Her duty to Jerome ended when she had kept her promise and had gone to him as he had wished. Thereafter, she should have quitted France and left her fate to work out its own course.

It was a confused, illogical argument ; but a woman's, nevertheless, and very logical to her. The night had been one of doubt unresting, of fleeting ideas, of suggestions of danger which no circumstances warranted. She had a thousand excuses for Jerome's absence ; but none of them satisfied her. His own courage and confidence in himself could not win her faith. She feared for him as she had never feared for herself, even in the darkest hour at Lamberg's house. Those who were intriguing against her, would they not, now that she was beyond their reach, find in him their subject and their opportunity ? At one moment, in the silent hours of sleeplessness, she told herself that they had trapped him, and that he was already on his way to Vienna.

At the next, she remembered his boasts and took heart anew. When her hope was at its ebb, she could even contemplate his death. The morning gave her this telegram to rebuke such foolish foreboding. Nothing had happened; all those shadows of the night, they were but shadows still: prudence had kept him in Paris. He would come to her when it was prudent to come. The curt, clear phrase was so like Jerome. He said, 'I will,' and would brook no contradiction. In her heart she knew that, wherever her own scruples might carry her, thither would he follow. It was her destiny.

Madame la Comtesse sat in the little morning-room when the girls discovered her. A cup of Spanish chocolate steamed before her; she had a book in her lap, and many papers and journals from Paris on the little table at her side. When she perceived the telegram which Féo carried, she stretched out a lean and withered hand, and laughed in that resonant, discordant key which was the terror of her servants.

'There it is, then! And the renegade keeps faith with us. He has cheated his gaolers, child; the brave heart! Oh! we shall be too much for them; we shall find you a husband. The good God help me! where are my spectacles?'

Victorine tittered. 'They are on your nose,

aunt. What folly! about the gaolers. As if there were such things nowadays. Jerome is very well, and is coming to-morrow. I said it was all nonsense, and Féo knew it. We are going to Pontarlier to meet him, and I shall drive Christobel. People say she's dangerous, and it's interesting.'

The old lady did not hear her. She was muttering over the telegram with a child's delight in a mystery.

'Prudence—ah, the dear boy, to think of it! That would mean that they are following him. He is afraid to write. I said so. They will never let him out of their sight. I know those Austrians. You must not leave the grounds, child. César shall ride through the woods and tell us if any one is there. "Caution detains." He is afraid to say more. We shall be prudent in our turn, for his friends will stick at nothing. I remember Marie Loisel in Vienna, twenty, twenty-two years ago. She was the friend of the Archduke Ferdinand. He promised to marry her. In a week she was dead—they said of heart disease. It was their story for the world. I heard another story—remember that, dear: there was another story. We must watch night and day; it is our duty.'

Féo heard her indifferently. 'You have been

very kind to me, and I shall remember it. I fear that Jerome has not told us all. And, of course, I cannot stay here now.'

The old lady raised her hands in a gesture of reproof and surprise.

'Cannot stay! The good God help us! What an idea, child! Where would you go to with that pretty face of yours? And leave my boy! Come, come, I like pretty faces about me. While I live, you shall want for nothing at the Château de Joux. Is it because I am a lonely old woman, with an ungrateful child to trouble me all day, that you speak of it? Ah! the world is very unkind, little singer.'

Féo knew not how to answer. Victorine rebelled and turned away peevishly.

'I wish I were a lonely old woman sometimes,' she said; 'there would be no one then to burn my letters.'

But madame did not hear her.

'Sing to me, child,' she said to Féo. 'I have heard all the great singers; I am as old as that. Fifty years ago I was at Dresden, when the people would not hear *Tannhäuser*. What wickedness! what folly! But the world always says "bravo" a long time after the curtain is down. You would make a fortune on the stage, my dear. You have everything—youth, a pretty

face, a heart to sing well. Your father ought to be ashamed of himself. I shall tell him so some day.'

Féo sighed. 'I have been singing for three years, and they gave me five pounds a week. I can't blame my father for that. If he had his way, all the other *artistes* would have been sent away, and there would have been no one at Covent Garden except myself. That is always the misfortune of second-rate talent. It allows nothing to genius, and everything to its enemies. But I know the truth: I have so much to learn. I despair sometimes of learning anything.'

Madame chuckled. 'Those days are over,' she said decisively. 'The wife of a Hapsburg does not need to learn anything. The world will say you are a genius the day after you are married, child. It said Wagner was mad because a mad king discovered him. Perhaps it was right. Donizetti was sane because he made the world dance. Sing *Tannhäuser* to me. I am too old to dance.'

Féo obeyed her; and in her art forgot a little while that to-morrow Jerome would come. The gloomy day dragged to its end laboriously. To her questions there was ever the same answer: 'No news, no news.'

CHAPTER XIX

PERIL

A MORNING of soft breezes and generous sunshine followed that sombre day of gloom and mists. The valley life, veiled yesterday under the pall of cloud and looming vapours, burst out anew as a stream long dammed. Birds sang in the gardens their note of liberty new found and of the summer's victory. The air was balmy with the odours of blossoms which the warm rain fostered. Even Madame la Comtesse forgot that she was a lonely old woman, and had eyes to see the beauty of her house. Everywhere the harvesters went cheerfully to their work. The bells rang out sweet music. It was a joy to breathe on such a day.

Féo had slept but little. She was very pale and thoughtful when she came out to the arbour wherein *déjeuner* had been prepared; nor could she participate in Victorine's childish delight and unfailing optimism. It was true that Jerome had promised to come to-day; true that if he kept

his promise, there would be no more night for her. Nevertheless, the doubt of it remained. There was always a 'but' now to war upon her anticipation. He would come—if prudence permitted. And he had sent no other message. There had been no word from him yesterday. The morning brought neither letter nor telegram.

'That's because he is coming,' said Victorine, when she had kissed Féo boisterously and dragged her to her seat; '*ma tante* is sure of it, and she is old enough to be a prophetess. If he had been detained, he would have sent another telegram. We are to drive to Pontarlier to meet the evening train. Aunt says it's dangerous for you to go. You must read the *Lives of the Saints* until we come back. It's her favourite book. She likes the part about the horrible tortures. Won't you be glad because it's to-day, Féo?'

'If it is to-day, of course I shall be glad, dear. I am getting into that state when one believes in nothing—except the things one doesn't want to believe in. If Jerome doesn't come soon, I shall go back to Paris to ask him why. It would be dreadfully silly, but, then, it is better to be silly than to do nothing at all. If I stop here another week, I shall be as old as your aunt, Victorine.'

Victorine clapped her hands.

'What an idea! If we could go to Paris! I have two hundred francs upstairs, and we might drive over this morning. Aunt would never miss us until dinner-time, and then it would be too late. I should see Paul and come back again. Don't you think it's splendid?'

'It would be splendid in a book. And, of course, you wouldn't mind walking back when our picnic was over. We should have to do that, I fear, unless you could flirt with the railway company, dear.'

Victorine pouted.

'I feel sometimes that I could flirt with anything—even the postman. Imagine a romance with a postman! He would bring his own letters, and you needn't put yours into the bag. When you wrote to tell him that all was over and you were another's, you could watch him crying as he went down the lane. There's a plot for a romance!'

She babbled on, stimulated by the sunshine and the sweet, fresh breeze of that perfect day. Though the post had brought no news from Paris, there was other news, and she rejoiced at it.

'Michon, the costumier, brings your walking dress this morning, and Jerome will see you in it

when we come back. Aunt says you are not to leave the grounds, but that's her nonsense. I shall tell him you will be at the cascade, Féo. White is your colour, and you'll look jolly. They like us to be pale; Paul told me so. It's more interesting, and they can sympathise. Paul used to sympathise every night when aunt was asleep. He said his hands were soft, and he would stroke my poor little head. They were such hard hands—but I never grumbled. I told him I would get well for his sake, and all the time I was as well as anything. When Jerome sees you to-night, he will be awfully kind because you're ill. It's nice when they're awfully kind, I think. *Ma tante* is going to wear her brocade to-day. She's just like one of the old women in the history books when she wears that. If Jerome doesn't come to-day, she'll declare that they've executed him in a dungeon. As if such things could happen in our time! Let's go and ride the ponies, Féo. I'll lend you my green habit, and you shall have Christobel. To-night will never come if we don't do something heroic.'

Féo accepted eagerly. Jerome had taught her to ride in the old days in Vienna. She was a good horsewoman, and a gallop over the splendid grass land of the outer park stimulated her courage and brought colour to her pretty cheeks.

She did not see the Countess until the day was growing old, and it was time for them to bring the great barouche to the door; but at that hour the old lady appeared for the first time that day, radiant in a splendid robe which might have come straight from the museum of antiquities at Versailles.

'We are going to bring the renegade back,' she said triumphantly, as footmen busied about her, and maids spread rugs, and she was hoisted to her seat as luggage to a van. 'I shall scold him for making my little girl pale to-day. And she will not leave the house. She will be prudent—eh, little singer, you mean to be prudent?'

'I am prudence itself,' said Féo.

'Remember that our enemies are many. They will not come to my house, for they know me. I shall write to the Archduke and tell him that he has made a fool of himself. You are safe at the Château de Joux, child. The good God help me! what have they done to the cushions?'

'How stupid you are, aunt!' exclaimed Victorine testily. 'You're sitting on the medicine bottles. And I believe you've killed Aphrodite.'

'Ah, the poor thing! But she's not like the others. She can put up with a little because she loves me. To the Gare, César. We shall have

luggage to bring back. Do not keep His Highness waiting.'

She dwelt a little upon the phrase, for even Madame la Comtesse de Berge could not wholly conceal the pride with which she welcomed a Prince to her house. Féo heard the words as the carriage rolled away; and then she repeated them again and again. Had she truly realised Jerome's birthright before that day? she asked herself. When first she met him in Vienna, it was as one who claimed none of those privileges attending his position, but lived rather the free life of a Bohemian and an artist. Many of his tastes were frankly democratic. He professed contempt for the empty ceremonies of an exclusive court; contempt for the coxcombs and vain women and shallow children of prejudice who composed the elect of Vienna. Yet it was a good-natured contempt; and she knew that, at heart, he clung to the patrician heritage, and esteemed nobility none the less because he must chide the follies of his age. A splendid soldier; an athlete who had learned his athletics in England; a musician by education and by taste—the man himself stood out above his fellows rather by his own gifts than by any magic of heredity. To Féo he had been as one of her own circle—the witty Jerome always; her lover rather

than the Archduke's heir. Some day, she understood vaguely, he would inherit that great white palace in Vienna and those boundless hills and woods which bordered the Danube, and were the Archduke's birthright. But that day was of the future, not to be contemplated, a day for dreams. Féo said it was amusing to hear Jerome called 'Highness.' She would tell the story to him when he arrived.

It was difficult to pass away the time, for she was too excited to read, and she must not go beyond the gates, and even the task of exploring the château could weary her at last. Once or twice she ventured to the lodge and gazed down at the sleeping valley, so still in the first hush of eventide. Or she would pace the gardens restlessly and roam the great galleries, and tell herself that Jerome was coming, that he would not disappoint her twice, and that she would hear his voice and hold his hand in hers before an hour had passed. Wherever impulse carried her, she found herself, at the end, looking out over the road to Pontarlier. He would come that way. She would espy the carriage when it was but a speck upon the horizon. The idea of danger amused her. What danger could there be in a place so remote from Paris and the Austrian? The Countess was really very amusing. Féo

ventured into the woods at last, for there was a place there, upon the very border of the road, where the view was superb, and even Pontarlier itself could be discerned.

She ventured into the wood and took her stand in a little arbour above the cascade which fell from the hillside to the burn far down in the valley below. It was six o'clock then; and everywhere in the distant villages, and from the steeples of the little churches, perched high in the mountains above her, the Angelus was proclaimed by dulcet bells. At such an hour the silence of the summer evening was intense, almost oppressive. It seemed to Féo that she had come to a spot lonely beyond her imagination.

Laugh as she might at the Countess's alarms, a memory of them grew upon her and was not to be put aside. She recollected suddenly that she was alone there—far from the château, beyond the hearing of any of the château's people. Another hour must pass before she might hope to see the carriage returning on the lonely white road below. She would spend it in the house, she said, at the piano; and, so resolving, she was about to quit the arbour, when she heard a footstep upon the gravel path without, and turning quickly, she found herself face to face with Otto

Lamberg. It was as though one had struck her a blow.

The Austrian was dressed faultlessly—she had never seen him when the same might not have been said. His hat, which shone as a mirror, seemed to have been purchased that very morning ; his grey frock suit was such as men usually display at garden parties. He carried the cane with the gold and amber head in his left hand ; his right played with the eye-glass which dangled upon his chest. That bland smile of his greeted her when first she observed him, and he continued to smile while he spoke to her.

‘Miss Féo,’ he said suavely, ‘I fear that this is an impertinent intrusion.’

Féo trembled in spite of herself. She heard now that which she had not heard before, a rumble of wheels on the road without. This man had come in a carriage, then—but not from Pont-arlier. She was sure of it ; no carriage had crossed the valley while she had been there. He had driven by the road from the Swiss frontier. The truth frightened her almost as much as his presence ; but she answered him quite coldly.

‘I express no opinion, Captain Lamberg, until I have heard what business brings you here.’

He advanced a little way towards her and

bowed slightly. His manners were not to be surpassed, she thought.

'My business is your business, mademoiselle ; the interest of one, who is none the less my friend because he is yours. In Paris you chose to misunderstand me and my actions. I will not seek at this time to convince you of the injustice that you did me. I would have kept you in my house, not for my own pleasure, but for yours. The mistake has cost you much. It has cost our friend more.'

She breathed quickly. He watched her as an advocate may watch a quailing witness. When she laughed nervously, he knew that she sought to disbelieve him, yet could not convince herself.

'Captain Lamberg,' she said quietly, 'when a man does not tell the truth, do you believe him a second time?'

He made a gesture of protest.

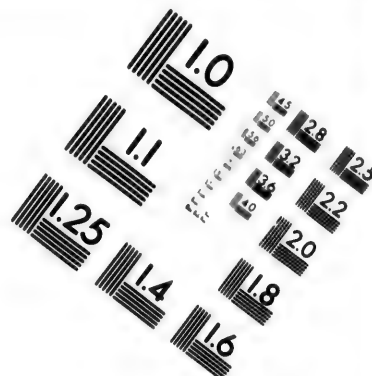
'Does not tell the truth, mademoiselle! Is it possible——'

'It is quite possible.'

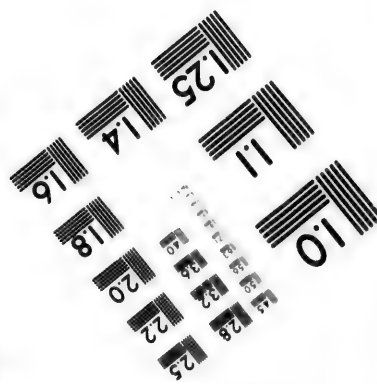
'You offend me. The reference is to the Prince's arrival in Paris, is it not?'

'And if it is?'

'If it is, permit me to say that I knew nothing of it. The Embassy did not advise me until you had left my house. It would have

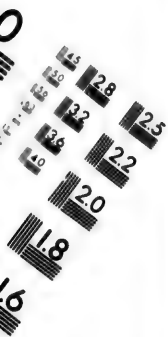


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been a lie if I had told you that Prince Jerome was in Paris when I believed him to be in London. Do me the justice to confirm that statement before you condemn me.'

He spoke almost appealingly, in a low, pleasing voice that was difficult to resist. Nevertheless, she knew that he was not telling her the truth. Something of that terror she had experienced in the Avenue Marceau was hers again in that instant; but she did not seek to escape him. There was a subtle fascination of his argument which held her to the spot. She found herself scanning the lonely road to Pontarlier almost pitifully. If Jerome were to come!

'I cannot discuss it with you,' she exclaimed at last, desperately. 'You say that you have business with me. What is it? I am among friends here—they shall help me to do you justice.'

He smiled again.

'Miss Féo,' he said, 'if I had come as your enemy, it would not have been to the Château de Joux in broad daylight. If you doubt me, summon your servants here. I will tell them that your father is waiting in a carriage twenty paces from this arbour. If he is not a fit companion for his daughter——'

She uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'My father, here——'

‘As I say. He is in the carriage which you can see through the trees there.’

Her face was white now; he could see how deeply the news troubled her. Impossible to summon the servants to defend herself against her own father. Hope left her in that instant. He had reckoned upon her reluctance, she thought.

‘Why does my father come here?’ she asked slowly; ‘why does he wish to see me?’

Lamberg took another step toward her, and spoke as one imparting a great secret.

‘To tell you that you wait here in vain; to tell you that our friend will not be permitted to leave Paris until it is known that you have quitted the Château de Joux. See how great a misfortune you have brought upon us. A little patience in my house and all would have been well. You distrust me—yet even now I am not unwilling to be your servant. Come, Miss Féo, do you think that I would betray the oldest of my friends, a brother officer, one who has faced death with me many a time, one whom I love with all my heart? It is for his sake that I am here to-night. Let your father speak to you, and he will tell you how great a wrong you do me!’

There was rather an appeal to her charity than any suggestion of command in his entreaty. While she knew that the man was unworthy

even of a hearing, the fact that her father waited for her, not twenty paces from the harbour, compelled her to listen to him. Again she scanned the lonely road to Pontarlier. There was not one human thing to be seen upon it. The bushes around her were silent with that silence which heralds tempest. A solitary bird sustained a plaintive note in the copse beyond the harbour. The gardens themselves were without voice or life. She could hope for no counsellor, could count upon no friend.

‘I will see my father,’ she exclaimed at last, when it was plain to her that there was no other course; ‘but I shall not leave this house—at least, until my friends come.’

‘You are your own mistress, mademoiselle. I can only tell you the circumstances, and leave you to act upon them as you please.’

Had she been thinking of the man alone, it is possible that he would have been unable to conceal the delight with which he anticipated her surrender. The nervous movement of his hands, a restless change of attitude, might well have told his story. But Féo was asking herself what she should say to her father. It was a strange meeting, she thought. The gloom of the old life seemed to wrap itself about her again as she quitted the harbour.

'My father is in the carriage?' she asked.

'Certainly, he is in the carriage. There is a little gate here; you know it, perhaps? We did not care to drive up to the house, as you will understand. I was for going to the village and coming back in the morning; but as we passed, we saw you in the harbour, and so time is saved. If we are to be of service to our friend, we must not delay. Ah, the thorns tear your pretty dress; let me help you——'

He held the gate open for her, and she passed through. So close had the brougham, of which he spoke, been driven to the pathway, that she could have touched it with her hand when she came out.

At the first glance it was not a carriage which called for notice. There were two men upon the box of it, and they touched their hats to her in the English fashion. The horses were big bays, seemingly quite fresh and ready for a journey. There was nothing to quicken that suspicion which the scene in the harbour had already awakened. Believing that her father sat in the carriage, and that she must face an angry scene with him, she went straight to the door which Lamberg held open for her. At the same instant the man put his left arm firmly about her waist, and closing his right hand upon her mouth, he

lifted her from her feet and pushed her into the brougham. One of the men upon the box sprang down and shut the door. The coachman slashed his whip ; the horses started off at a gallop ; a cloud of white dust alone marked the path they followed.

‘Do not distress yourself, young lady. We shall not hurt you. You have made it necessary. Accept the inevitable.’

Féo, breathless, with hair awry and crimson cheeks, sank back upon the cushions and laughed in the Austrian’s face.

‘I knew that it was a lie,’ she exclaimed, almost as one speaking in the triumph of a prophecy fulfilled.

CHAPTER XX

THE ROAD TO NEUFCHÂTEL

TWILIGHT had been coming down upon the hills when they quitted the harbour. It was already growing dark upon the lower road as the carriage rolled on at a gallop toward Neufchâtel and the Swiss frontier. But to Féo neither daylight nor darkness mattered. She did not think of the route or of her environment. While her head was a whirl of ideas, of reproaches, of regrets, of anger, nevertheless, that self-control, which rarely deserted her even in the crises of her life, remained to her. From the first it had been plain that she would gain nothing by a scene. There were three men with the carriage. Had she cried out, her cries would have been cast back by the walls of the ravine through which the carriage passed. To appeal to the pity of such a creature of intrigue as Otto Lamberg was not to be thought of. She stood alone, relying upon her courage and her brains. Fear of what might come after was less

a factor than the thought that Jerome might even then be on his way from Pontarlier. She imagined the surprise, the apprehension, the distress of her friends at the château. And old Madame de Berge! Féo laughed again when she remembered what a tale that would be for the Countess to relate.

'You are amused, then, mademoiselle! Bravo! that is the way to take it. If you continue to be sensible, we will lower the shutters, and it will not be so stuffy in here.'

She looked at the windows of the carriage, and observed that the shutters covered the glass. But she did not answer Lamberg, and he continued apologetically—

'I fear that I was very rough. I could not help it. Am I not a monster to treat you so?'

She tossed her head back upon the cushions and replied defiantly.

'Agreed,' she said, remembering the slang of her schooldays. 'Tell me some more stories; they are amusing.'

He replied by lowering the shutter upon his side and letting down the glass.

'You are sensible, I see. That is well. We shall understand each other presently. Do you know where we are going to?'

'I don't know and I don't care. Were you

ever an actor, Captain Lamberg? How you would have made the people cry! Think of your dearest friend whom you love like your own brother!

He fixed his glass in his eye and stared at her. Tears, entreaties, those he had expected; but this indifference was beyond his reckoning.

'Listen to me,' he said; 'the time for all that is past. I have the greatest sympathy for you. I wish I could help you. But I am a servant of the State, and my duty must be done. In the end you will thank me, and our friend will thank me. He is returning to Vienna, where he has his work to do. You are going back to London, where your father is waiting for you. The rest was all folly—the folly of two children. You are a sensible girl, and will come to see that by and by. The Prince is an impulsive fellow, and will not see it so quickly. But it is all for the best, believe me.'

She sat up in the carriage. The gesture alarmed him. He thought that she was about to cry out, and his hand went to the window.

'Believe *you*!' she exclaimed.

He released the strap and nodded his head.

'There are times to believe, and times not to believe,' he said; 'a wise head judges between them. When the truth serves me, I tell it. The

State has no conscience, Miss Féo. I am the State in this matter.'

'How flattered I should be! Here is the State ready to jump out of the window when I lift a finger.'

He laughed in spite of himself.

'Come,' he said, 'help me to make this a pleasant journey. You cannot make it anything else. Circumstances are unkind enough to be against you. I have authority at my back. I have only to raise my hand so——'

'And the stars go out. Please do not raise it. I want to see the State while I can.'

He was very angry, but had sense enough to ignore the interruption.

'I have only to raise my hand, so,' he repeated, 'and the first gendarme we meet will be my willing servant. The French Government is the friend of the Austrian Government in this affair. It forbids you to remain any longer in France, mademoiselle. I am instructed to see you to Calais, and, if you wish it, to London, where your father waits for you. He approves all that I am doing. He no longer desires that his daughter shall pursue a chimera.'

'He is concerned for me, my father; how touching!'

'Possibly; the domestic emotions are not under

discussion. I have only to ask you to behave sensibly. This affair is very distasteful to me. You will believe that, Miss Féo?’

‘Oh, of course; I have *your* word, Captain Lamberg.’

‘And you will promise me to do nothing foolish?’

She looked at him scornfully.

‘Do you expect that I shall make a scene, then—call upon Heaven to help me and appeal to the first *sergent de ville* we meet? Oh no, I shall do nothing of the sort. We are not at the opera. I might imagine you as Mephisto if you didn’t wear an eye-glass; but really, Captain Lamberg——’

She laughed at her own thoughts and nestled back in the cushions. He gnawed the end of his stick, but would not permit himself the luxury of a temper. After all, he had won the game. He could forgive her these little stabs at his vanity.

‘We shall be friends yet,’ he said, peering out of the window as they approached a little village and the shriek of a railway whistle came faint upon the breeze; ‘when you are in London, you will see things as I see them. Meanwhile, here is the station. You know Boveresse, made-moiselle?’

‘I never heard of it.’

'It is on the line from Neufchâtel. They are stopping the Paris express for me. I have reserved a carriage for you. At Pontarlier you shall have a *wagon-lit* if you will give me your word to be sensible.'

'Your kindness is overwhelming! How grateful the Prince will be to you! I shall never forget this delightful journey.'

He looked at her sharply. She was still very pale, but, apparently, there was no thought now of contesting the circumstances. He argued that she was a sensible girl and had accepted the inevitable. It was just as well, he remembered, that this should be so. A scene was as distasteful to him as it was to her. Besides, such a fatality might help to make the affair public. He would have given a thousand pounds to have kept any word of that night's work from the newspapers.

'This is the station, young lady. You will not give us any trouble, I am sure.'

'Trouble! Am I a convict, then?'

'I mean that you will be reasonable?'

'I am always reasonable.'

'And understand that this is for the best. I shall not forget to give a good account of you at Vienna.'

'Most flattering! Please give my love to all

the people who turned me out of the Opera House. I shall never forget their kindness.'

'They did not understand you. And musical people are always jealous. I have never yet discovered a musician who believed that other musicians were possible. *La musique, c'est moi.* That is their motto. You will be a great singer some day, and Vienna will open its arms to you. I shall be there ; I shall applaud you.'

'Thunder-claps — what a noise you would make! Jerome must know of your promise. Your dearest friend, whom you love as your own brother, you will let him come to hear me, I suppose?'

Again he looked at her closely. The frivolity of her talk was a little disquieting. He set it down to anxiety. But he was not sorry when the carriage stopped presently in the courtyard of the station, and a man with a lantern came out to light them to the platform.

'We are at Boveresse,' he said, opening the door quickly. 'There will be no other passengers, for the night mail does not stop here as a rule. I am sure you will be sensible, and do as I bid you.'

'You tire me,' was her answer ; 'please get out.'

He gave her his hand, and she jumped lightly to the pavement. It was almost dark then.

She could see the hovering peaks, which towered up behind the little station as great looming shadows of the night. A few lamps twinkled in the vicinity of the railway. There were no strangers about the door of the Gare; but the station-master greeted Lamberg as though he had been expecting him, and the man from the box of the brougham followed them to the platform.

'It's a poor place, but there is a little waiting-room,' said Lamberg anxiously, as he conducted her through the bureau. 'I expect the train in a quarter of an hour. We shall find rugs for you from somewhere, and I will lend you a cape. The nights can be cold even in June. We must not let you suffer any inconvenience, Miss Féo.'

She did not answer him. Far out in the valley below, she could see a great patch of light, as a lake of fire in the heart of a desolate country. And thither her eyes turned, to the west and the open country and the last glory of the day. For there was the Château de Joux, and in that house Jerome was waiting for her.

CHAPTER XXI

FOR FREEDOM

JEROME was waiting, but would wait in vain, she said. This new humiliation, which her love had put upon her, compelled her to the determination that, whatever befell, she would go back to him no more. It was as though she became conscious, upon that instant, of a mistake which, in its result, was little less than a crime. All her latent pride asserted itself, and would not be denied. The events of recent days had warred subtly upon her logic; but this awakening permitted her to judge of them and to perceive the falsity of her reasoning. To scheme, to plot, to hide herself from the world, to be ashamed in order that she might become the wife of a man who loved her, appeared to her now, not in the light of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, but as the sordid actions of an intriguer. So the world would judge her, she thought. She wondered that she could have been so misled;

she was almost grateful for this possibility of respite. The shame of her position became intolerable.

A prisoner, to be called adventuress by those who willed it, to be the scorn of any tattler, branded as a dangerous woman who must be banished from France, the punishment of her folly seemed more than she could bear. The journey before her must be the ultimate insult, she thought. No felon could have been watched more closely or guarded so surely. The impulse to escape her gaolers grew upon her minute by minute. She knew that she would risk her own life gladly to win that freedom which had never stood for so much to her as during those moments of waiting in the little room at Boveresse.

There were two windows in this *salle d'attente*—one looking out upon the platform, the other showing her the bare station-yard and the carriage which had brought her. Though the man tried to conceal himself from her view, she perceived a gendarme hiding behind the porch of the bureau; and on the other side, quite close to the door, there stood the fellow who had passed for a footman and driven with them from the château. The hopelessness of her position became clearer to her as she watched these men. If the French Government did, in truth, give

a tacit support to the Austrian's actions, then, indeed, was her dream of escape a folly. Who would help her in the great station at Pontarlier, or listen to her while she was on French soil? Leslie Drummond must be in London again by this time. The very name of her own city could conjure up pictures of darkness and gloom. In thirty hours she would be there again, penniless and friendless. The idea of returning to the old life, of serving her father in his lethargy of selfishness and complaint, was not to be supported. She must win her own way now; must stand truly alone, as in reality she had been during so many long years of her unattaining life.

This was her reasoning as she stood at the windows of the dusty room and looked out upon the vista of twinkling red lights, of hills towering above the shining rails, of a great cutting through the cliff and a tunnel beyond. Would the express never come? she asked. It was a degradation surpassing words to pace that apartment and to tell herself that she was as a caged animal, imprisoned there for all the world to see. Her anger against Lamberg became a passion of self-reproach and lament, when she had the leisure to debate it. She had given him this opportunity; she allowed nothing to such consideration

as he had shown her. She would not see that the platform was deserted ; that no one save her gaolers had been admitted to the station. In her imagination all France gazed through that open window. When a porter came and stood there, she could have struck him in the face. She did not know that he alone could be of service to her.

‘Mademoiselle, mademoiselle—a moment.’

She heard him address her as he pretended to be pasting a bill to one of the boards hanging near the window ; but her only answer was to turn her back upon him. The idea of sympathy at such a moment, and from such a source, was a humiliation surpassing all others of the night. A blow, a threat, an oath—those would have been more in keeping with that temper which for the first time had almost robbed her of her self-control.

‘Mademoiselle, mademoiselle — I am César’s brother.’

The words were spoken almost in a whisper ; but now she turned quickly and stared at the man. He was an uncouth, shaggy-headed *paysan* ; nevertheless, as he stood there beneath the lamp she recognised a certain likeness to César, the coachman at the château. The man himself, looking round carefully, to be sure that none heard him, repeated the words—

'I am César's brother, mademoiselle.'

'Well,' she asked quickly, 'and what then?'

'I cannot help you; it is not in my power,—but I know, mademoiselle——'

He stopped abruptly. The man guarding the door of the *salle*, which he had left to exchange a word with Lamberg, came back quickly. The porter continued to paste up his bill with an excellent imitation of stupidity.

'The express is just coming, m'sieu. I have been telling mademoiselle——'

'You should learn to hold your tongue. Come, get about your business; my luggage is waiting.'

The porter slouched away, grumbling. Féo, forgetting her train of thought as she asked herself what he had wished to say to her, came out upon the platform; for the express was in sight, they told her. She could hear it approaching now—a mere echo at first, as of distant thunder, then a deafening roar, magnifying ever in the ravine to terrible sounds, as of great rocks crashing down from the heights above. Presently its head-lights flashed out and the engine seemed to leap down upon the station; the ravine was iridescent with the glow from the windows of the carriages; white steam hissed and showered in the warm air; there was a glimpse of driver and fireman, their faces outstanding in the deep

light of the furnace ; people appeared at the doors of the carriages ; others lay at full length upon the seats, or were reading, or rousing themselves to know why the train stopped. Then Féo heard Lamberg's voice, and she followed him to the carriage without a word.

'Here is our compartment, mademoiselle.'

It was an ordinary first-class carriage, and it had been reserved for them at Neuschâtel. She was surprised to see that Lamberg alone was to be her companion ; but she did not confess her surprise to him. It was amusing, she said, that he should take so much thought for her comfort. Rugs, pillows, books, a little lamp for her to read by, a box of sweets—one by one he handed these things into the carriage.

'We shall dine at Pontarlier,' he explained : 'I wish it could be before ; but here are some cakes, if you are hungry.'

She thanked him with a word, and crossed the compartment to lower the other glass. They had left the carriage in the sun all day, and the stuffiness of it was intolerable. It needed an effort to breathe ; she sank into the corner seat and fanned herself with a newspaper.

All the paraphernalia of travel had been arranged now. Lamberg himself was on the platform giving the station-master final instruc-

tions. Whatever hope Féo had indulged in—a hope that her friends at the château might yet follow after—was to be thought of no more. They were about to start; she could see the guard signalling to the engine-driver; a man blew a tin trumpet; the shaggy-headed porter sprang up on her side of the carriage and turned a key in the lock. They feared, then, that she would do something foolish. Yet was it so? Certainly the porter's behaviour was very strange. He nodded and made a signal to her. As in an inspiration she read his message. He was not locking the door, but unlocking it.

The vision of an instant, the act of a man who sprang to the footboard and leaped down again almost before his name could have been uttered twice. Lamberg himself, in close talk with the station-master, saw nothing of the act or the doer. The train began to move slowly from the platform. To Féo the moment was as the very crisis of her life. The door was unlocked, she repeated; beyond it lay freedom. And she must not delay. One by one the station lights disappeared from her view. She heard that sudden ebb of sound which spoke of the open country lying between Boveresse and the gorge of the mountains. Once more she looked out over the lone valley where the twinkling stars could

send such a message of home and love and joy of the night. Jerome was waiting for her where those lights shone out, she said.

And so she took her resolution, and, caring nothing save for that freedom she desired so ardently, she opened the door and leaped blindly from the train.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RING OF HOOFS

IT was a blind leap, out into the darkness. Though the train had not, at that time, gathered any great velocity, Féo had the sensation of being thrown forward as upon a buoyant breeze, which lifted her for the moment, and then, dying away, flung her heavily to the earth. Lights flashed in her eyes—the lights of the carriages which towered above her—she was dazed, breathless; yet never once did panic rob her of the power to think and act. Freedom! she had won it, then! A little pain, a sense of numbness in her limbs, above all the question, 'Could she stand?' were first to trouble her. But the imminence of the peril prevailed above them. They would stop the express; men would come out from the station with lanterns. She staggered to her feet, driven on by the danger; and forgetting all, she laughed aloud because she could walk again.

She had fallen upon the soft grass which bordered the line, and to this she owed her life. Young limbs had befriended her well that night. Though her pretty white dress was torn from the shoulder to the waist, and she had lost her hat, and her right hand was bleeding, and her ankle very painful, she cared nothing for misfortunes so trivial.

Far away now, in the gorge of the hills, she could see the red lamp of the vanished train. Lamberg had not stopped it, then. Or was he afraid to stop it, lest his story should be heard by every passenger? She said that it was a troublesome question, to be answered at her leisure.

Down below her, thirty feet or more, was the white road which led to the château. She must gain that road before the news passed — must seek the refuge of some lonely house. Whatever befell, her moments of respite would be few. In the end the express would be warned, and would return.

Such conclusions drove her on apprehensively. She crossed the shining rails, and looked down at the path whereby safety lay. A carriage passed the place where she stood, the carriage in which she had been driven to the station. There was no longer a second man upon the box of it, and he, she imagined, was in the

express which should have taken her to Paris. The assurance gave her courage. Those at Boveresse could have no interest in her misfortune; the Countess's name, when she could utter it, must befriend her. She determined to appeal to the sympathy of the first stranger she met; and despite her resolution, to send word to the château. That much she owed to her friends and to her own necessity.

Until this moment she had been able to think and act at her will. There were no lights in the station now that the express had set out for Paris. From the hamlet itself there came no sound of life or movement. Once she thought that she heard a distant locomotive whistling shrilly in the mountains, and this frightened her; but the signal was not repeated, and she took heart again.

On the road below, the black brougham passed slowly by; she feared to leave the shelter of the embankment until the carriage disappeared from her sight. Nor did she forget, as she crouched beside a great boulder and rested her aching head upon her hands, that her friends at the château might even then be seeking her.

If Jerome came to Boveresse! The weakness of her womanhood asserted itself in the silence and the pain of those moments. There

were tears in her eyes when at last she could admit that the road was hers, and that she must follow it without delay.

The embankment was steep and stony, rough grass knitting together the great boulders of grey rock which were its strength. At any other time, the perilous descent would have frightened her; but the darkness of the night, and the knowledge how short those instants of respite must be, quickened her nerve and steadied her foot. Step by step she went down, halting often to cling to bush or stone; despairing sometimes of success; buoyed up again by the assurance that the express had not been stopped.

Already she had accomplished the half of her journey, and no one had passed along the deserted road. A few more steps, she said, and the château would be in sight. She had taken one, when a voice, speaking from the darkness, arrested her abruptly.

‘Mademoiselle! mademoiselle!’

She leant back against the rock, panting. The impulse to cry out for help was conquered with difficulty. Then she began to laugh at herself. The man, who had spoken, was the shaggy-headed porter from the station.

‘Mademoiselle, you are there, then? I am César’s brother, mademoiselle.’

'Give me your arm,' she said quickly. 'I have hurt my ankle, and cannot walk.'

He appeared suddenly from the rails above.

'Well,' he cried, 'you have pluck, mademoiselle, to come down here alone!'

'I must reach the château to-night. If you will help me, you shall be well rewarded.'

'Do not speak of such a thing. I knew that you would jump, mademoiselle. "She has courage," I said. And the Austrian rat has gone on alone? Bravo!'

He put his arm about her maladroitly, as one unaccustomed to the care of an object so fragile. Her pallor frightened him. She was going to die, he thought.

'Be careful, mademoiselle. You are in pain; I can see it. You suffer, mademoiselle?'

She laughed.

'My hand is cut and my ankle is sprained. If you don't help me quickly, the train will come back.'

He was about to protest that they would not stop the Paris mail for twenty Austrians, when a short, sharp whistle echoed in the gorge, and a moment later the express itself appeared, backing slowly into the station.

'Hush, mademoiselle! They have come back, then. For God's sake do not speak a word.'

She lay against the rock, trembling as with an ague. The express passed slowly over the embankment above. There were faces at the windows of the carriages; the guard rode upon the footboard of his van, and searched the track with his lantern.

'What news?' asked the porter, standing up boldly where all could see him.

'A young lady has fallen out of the train. We are looking for her.'

'You have come to the wrong place, my boy. I am just from the station, and there is no one here.'

'Then go and look on the other side, flat-head. Come, be quick; we cannot wait here all night.'

The guard continued to wave the engine back towards the station. It travelled at a snail's pace, and the excitement of those within the carriages increased with every beat of the cylinder.

'It would be about here, monsieur. She cannot be alive, or she would speak to us. If she is dead, we shall find her.'

The stupendously clever observations of the multitude were heard at intervals.

Lamberg himself stood at the open door of his compartment, his glass in his eye, a supercilious smile upon his face. The girl could not escape

him, he thought. She had been very foolish, and he was sorry for her. He would tell her so when she was found. If she were dead, so much the better; if she were not dead, he would make it his business to see that both doors were locked next time.

Féo could hear his voice as he asked the guard a question, and was answered none too civilly. The officials resented the delay; they would not have tolerated it but for the authority which he carried.

'They will come along presently with lanterns, mademoiselle,' said the porter, when the engine had gone by and was almost at the station. 'If you do not wish to be found here, you must permit me to carry you.'

She stood up with an effort which cost her pain.

'What is the good of talking like that?' she exclaimed impatiently. 'Am I to dig a hole in the ground and hide in it?'

'But they are coming from the Gare, mademoiselle; you can see their lanterns.'

He pointed to the station behind them. Little flakes of fire seemed dropping from the embankment to the rocks below. They could hear men's voices and answering cries from the heights above.

'You see, mademoiselle——'

'Oh,' she cried, 'what do you want me to do? Where shall I go——?'

'There is a hut on the other side of the road; the employés keep their tools in it. I have the key, mademoiselle. Come, I shall carry you well enough.'

He picked her up in his trained arms as though she had been a child, and almost leaping from rock to rock, he gained the foot of the embankment. She could distinguish the hut from that place—a little building of wood with a tarred roof.

They crossed the road together, darting from side to side as hares disturbed in their sleeping-places. She did not feel any pain at the moment, for the excitement of mind prevailed above it; but when the man had pushed her into the hut, and locked the door behind her, she sank down in agony intolerable.

'Keep up your courage, mademoiselle. They will not come here; I shall see to that. If any one knocks, remember that it will be César's brother.'

She could hear his receding footsteps, and, anon, his voice when he hailed the search-party then scouring the embankment as those who look for money by a lantern's light.

It was so dark in the hut that she could not see where the door stood. At her back she felt a bundle of sticks. The earth upon which she crouched was rough to the hand, as though with the remaining ashes of a fire.

But her thoughts were without. They could not pass by that place, she reasoned. Lamberg would insist upon it being searched.

Again and again she distinguished his voice as he urged the officials to diligence or forbade the express to proceed.

When the clamour at last died away, and the tension of the scene relaxed, she remembered her hurt, and wondered how she would limp to safety even if opportunity came.

Silence, absolute, unbroken, reigned for many minutes. She began to tell herself that the search was indeed abandoned, when some one pushed so roughly at the door of the hut, that the whole structure threatened to topple down upon her. The end had come, she thought. So much had she dared to contrive this pitiful ending.

'The door is locked, you say. Then go and get the key.'

Lamberg's voice was unmistakable. He stood at the door now, and his presence could make her tremble again. When her friend, the porter, answered him, she dared to breathe once more.

'The key is at the house of the ganger, monsieur. He would be asleep at this time. There can be no one in that place; it has been locked all day.'

'When I wish for your opinions, I will ask for them. You heard me tell you to get the key?'

'At your service, monsieur. If you want the key, I will go and get it. But do not forget that there are other places—Bergot's Wood and the farm buildings there.'

'Ha! there is a farm, then? Is it far from here?'

'It is just there, where you can see a light between the trees, monsieur.'

'Very well, I will go there. You will have the key and be here with it when I return.'

A sound of quick steps followed upon the argument.

Féo had risen in her excitement, and now stood, breathing quickly, against the door of the hut. The darkness of the place oppressed her strangely.

'Take heart, mademoiselle. I shall not find the key. And I hear wheels.'

'The place suffocates me,' she answered. 'I cannot stop here.'

'Hush, mademoiselle! there is some one coming.'

She listened intently. Mingled voices were to

be heard without, but above the words she could distinguish a sound which was as music to her ears. A carriage approached upon the road from Pontarlier. The ring of hoofs, telling of a horse hard pressed, became clearer every instant. When the sound ceased suddenly, the reaction of the moment almost robbed her of her strength. She stood, dazed and helpless, to watch the door swing back, and to shield her eyes from the blinding rays of the porter's lantern.

'This way, monsieur. Mademoiselle is here.'

There were many faces at the door. She saw but one. It was the face of Jerome; and remembering her courage, she in turn raised a laughing face to his.

'It could have been no one else,' she said; and with that she fell fainting into his arms.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE INSULT

HE had driven from the château in a dog-cart, with two grooms to aid the search. The officials at the station, recognising the livery of Madame la Comtesse, made way for him respectfully. The shaggy-headed porter, who had won so great a victory, stood blinking with delight as this masterful fellow gave his orders masterfully.

It was the work of a moment to lift Féo to the cart, and to wrap the heavy rug about her. Where ten of those, who looked on, had been ready to hunt her down a few minutes ago, there were twenty now willing to declare that her welfare alone concerned them.

'Ah, the brave! She leaped from the train, monsieur. He said that he had authority, and I believed him. I am a fool, monsieur, and I am a fool. Mademoiselle is very pale; I fear she is ill. There is brandy at the station, if you wish, monsieur.'

So they came crowding about the cart; but

Jerome did not hear them. He knew something of surgery, and was already making sure that no bones were broken. The wan, white face appealed to him as it had never appealed before in the finest moments of his love; but he went to work as one indifferent.

'She has hurt her ankle; I do not think that there is anything else. The fresh air is better than brandy, thank you. Let the seat be moved back a little; it will give her room. I am taking her to the château. You will tell that to any one who asks you.'

Deliberately still, he settled himself in his seat and took the reins. The villagers, some raising lanterns, some continuing to offer their apologies, drew back to let the horse go.

A start was being made, when Lamberg himself stepped from the shadow to the road, and laid a hand upon the bridle rein.

'I must speak to you,' he said.

Jerome looked at him for an instant as at some peasant who had dared a childish insult. Then he raised his whip and slashed him heavily across the face.

'There is a subject to discuss,' he said quietly. 'I am at the Château de Joux if you wish to pursue it.'

The man's hand fell from the rein, but he did

not flinch at the blow. That supercilious smile, which served him alike for victory or defeat, was his answer to the act. He smiled still when the horse, impatient of control, bounded forward at a gallop upon the road to Pontarlier. At the gorge's head Jerome could still see him standing motionless in the midst of the affrighted villagers. To-morrow he would send his friends to the château. It was well that he should do so. They had been fighting in the dark too long already; a little daylight would be good.

This was the younger man's first thought as he checked the good horse to a fast trot, and began to remember Féo's need. She had swooned at the door of the hut; but her faintness had been momentary; and now the cool night air, blowing fresh upon her face, proved a better tonic than any he could have prescribed. They had not driven the third part of a mile before she sought to release herself from the arm which held her, and to speak to him of all that had happened.

'You cannot drive like that,' she said, with a brave attempt to make light of it; 'besides, there is no excuse.'

For answer he reined in the horse and took a flask of brandy from his pocket.

'Come,' he said, 'I am the physician at present,

and I prescribe this. One tablespoonful to be taken immediately.'

She made a little grimace, but did as he wished. Unaccustomed to stimulant, the spirit brought the blood to her cheeks and warmth to her limbs.

'There,' she said, 'I am the model of obedience.'

He let the horse go again. He still had his arm about her, and he drew her close to him.

'Is this part of the treatment, too?' she asked.

'Brandy is a very good thing as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. I expect you will feel all this to-morrow. I wonder how many women would have had the courage to do what you did. If I had known, I don't think I could have driven over.'

'But as it is——'

'As it is, I say, thank God.'

'I am glad that you did not know,' she answered simply.

He stooped and kissed her on the lips.

'Thank God, thank God it was no worse, little Féo,' he exclaimed; and heart and love for her were to be read in his voice. It was the first word of affection he had spoken since he found her.

'I am glad that you did not know,' she repeated; 'though, if I confessed all, I should tell that I did not mean to return to the château at all.'

'Not return—then where would you have gone to?'

'I don't know. Oh, cannot you see what a humiliation all this is?'

He looked down at her white face, but did not wholly grasp her meaning.

'Are we not both humiliated?' he asked gravely. 'If your hurt is not my hurt, what is love worth? We mustn't talk of this to-night, Féo. There will be many things to tell you to-morrow—many things for you to hear and for me to do. At present I cannot think about them. I am too anxious, and an anxious man is never a good doctor, whatever the matter may be. I am going to send into Pontarlier for the best surgeon in the place, and when he has seen you, it will be time enough to look at the other side of our picture. Can't you understand how anxious I am, Féo?'

She answered him in a whisper, a word that he wished. Then she closed her eyes and tried to forget where she was, and all that had brought about that night of nights. The moon shone now, clear and white upon the lonely road. You could see the hamlets in the near valley as clusters of lights to be pricked off upon a darkened chart. The peaks above the great domed hills began to stand out of the rolling vapours, and to

lift black shapes to the world of glittering stars. That sense of rest, and of peace enduring, which she had desired so ardently, was hers in that moment. She realised again, as once she had realised before, that all her hope of life lay in her lover's keeping.

'Tell me,' she exclaimed suddenly, 'were you not surprised?'

'Not altogether. I expected something of the sort. When we drove in, and they said that you had been to the gate but had not returned, I thought of our old friend Lamberg at once. Then Michel, the gardener, was there with his story of a strange carriage on the road to Neufchâtel. I did not wait for any more. Madame, of course, struck an attitude, and wanted to send for the soldiers. Little Victorine wept. That was honest at least.'

'And you——'

'Oh, I ordered the dog-cart!'

He said no more, for the gates of the château came in view, and soon the welcome sound of hounds baying, and of many voices raised together, broke upon her ears. All the servants of the house were there at the lodge; but little Victorine was the first to run toward the cart; and when she saw Féo, and Jerome cried to her that all was well, tears of honest gladness were

her only answer. At the great door of the hall itself, madame stood as some mistress of old time to welcome the fugitives. She had forgotten her love for drama in the more human love of sympathy.

'My child, my little girl,' she cried again and again; 'oh, I thank God for this night!'

Féo did not know what response to make. The love and sympathy overwhelmed her. There were tears in her eyes, too; but tears of gratitude and not of pain.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUNSHINE

IT was upon the morning of the fifth day after Féo came back to the château that Léon Oster, the plump little doctor from Andelot, expressed the opinion that it was very rash; but gave his consent, nevertheless, when his patient wished to sit in the garden tent for one hour precisely at the full tide of the noon sun.

'Folly, folly!' he had exclaimed, with that little gesture of the hand which implied a profound contempt for all human weaknesses, 'but have your own way, my child. The world goes too fast nowadays. You are all in too much of a hurry. I tell you that bed is the best medicine for you, and you won't take it. Have your own way, and if you die, don't complain that it is my fault.'

'I can't stop in bed,' she pleaded; 'I think of everything that is horrible there. It's beautiful to rest when you can just shut your eyes and say that nothing matters. I can't do that, and so I am going to get up, doctor. No one dies unless

he means it. You mustn't be angry, and you must tell them that I am quite well.'

'Perjury, my child, rank perjury. If Madame la Comtesse were half as ill as you are, she would have twenty doctors from Paris. They would come here and drink her wine, and look out of the window, and tell us that it is a fine day. I know it is a fine day, and so I let you go out into the garden. Pouf—the doctors from Paris, humbugs all of them, remember that, mademoiselle!'

He went bustling away to his buggy, which was the wonder of the valley; and when he had gone, little Victorine came to the room to hear the good news. She nursed an immense bouquet of pink roses, and her words fell as a torrent.

'You are to go out; isn't it splendid! He is at Pontarlier, but he will be back to *déjeuner*. Aunt wants to arm the gardeners with pistols, but Michel nearly shot his wife last night, so they are all to be taken away again. Jerome gathered these, but I made them up. You won't tell, because I promised that I wouldn't. There have been a lot of strange men about the house, and *ma tante* says they are detectives. Jerome laughs, because they are what the English call the Cook's tour. Oh, Féo, you must come down—he does want you so.'

Féo took the roses and pressed them to her cheek. Every hour now brought some new token of the generous love of those who had taken her to their home and made her as one of their own children. Those days of rest had been the recompense for long years of loneliness, for the stress and toil of a friendless life. They had taught her that affection, asking nothing of its gifts, may be found still in the by-paths of the world.

'I am your *enfant gâtée*,' she said to Victorine smilingly; 'how glad you will all be when I am gone!'

'Jerome will; of course he's dying with impatience. I think he's lived on the stairs ever since you came back. Don't pretend to know, because it's a secret. If it were Paul, I should have liked it, and so I must tell. We're to have *déjeuner* in the tent, and to-morrow we drive to the cascades. *Ma tante* wants an escort from the barracks. I said that it would be jolly if the men were nice—and that made her cross. And, oh, I forgot—César's brother has a big gold watch. Jerome gave it to him, and last night he came back to ask us to take care of it. He was frightened to have it in his house. As if any one would know that a railway porter had a gold watch.'

She gossiped on, helping Féo to dress, and promising a hundred delights for the hours of convalescence. When the work was done, and they were out in the gardens, they found madame in a great arm-chair at the tent's door, and her cry of welcome was spoken from her very heart.

'Ah, to see you, my child, it is to see the sun again. Every day I have been telling the doctor that you were dying for a little sunshine. Come and sit near me, my dear; come and sit where all the world can look at you. Let Françoise bring the cushions; the good God help me, where is Françoise?'

'I am here, madame, at your elbow.'

'Then why don't you answer me when I call you? Am I to go and fetch my own servants because I am a lonely old woman? Make mademoiselle comfortable. Let Michel know that she is in the garden. If there are any strange men about, come and tell me. Ah, my child, those men, those wicked men, they are here every day; they come and stare into the gardens. I hear them at night when I am asleep. Is it not awful to think that such things are possible, in our time, in this France I love?'

Victorine kicked the grass with her pretty foot.

'Don't be silly, aunt; there are no men at all.

They go up to see the old château on the hill where Mirabeau was imprisoned. That was the man who cut off people's heads and ran away with somebody to Holland. It doesn't tell you all about it in the histories, but I know. Her name was Sophie, and she didn't mind. I expect she lived in a dark old house and never saw any one. If Mirabeau were up there now, I would go and say to him, "My name is Sophie, and I think I'd like to go to Holland." Wouldn't you be cross, aunt, when dinner-time came and I wasn't down !'

Madame raised her hands in a gesture of woe.

'The ingratitude, the base ingratitude! You shall go back to the convent, *misérable*. The good God help me, I will not have such things said, even in jest.'

'Oh, I mean it, aunt! And it would be jolly at the convent. There is Père Rolot there; he always liked me.'

She ran away as a deer across the soft green grass, and they could hear her girlish voice presently as she asked a hundred questions of the postman, who had just come up. But madame turned to Féo, and began to commiserate with her again.

'Ah,' she said, 'if she would only learn a lesson from you, my dear. But it's in the blood; we

can't struggle against that ; we are as God made us. Her father was a lancer, who fell at Wörth. Her mother was the daughter of a painter, who shamed the family by starving at Vincennes. You see the child ; you see what I have to put up with. When you are well again, it will be different. You will be kind to a poor old woman, and she will be grateful ; she will find a husband for you, my dear. The men—the men—we must always think of them, even when we are old, Féo. There is no escape ; it is our destiny.'

'Destiny is very hard sometimes,' said Féo with a sigh. 'Especially when the men don't think of us. We rebel because it is inevitable, and we refuse to believe the truth. To-day you make me happy. Yet where shall I be when a week, a month, has passed ?'

'Where will you be ? Why, at the Château de Joux, of course.'

Féo shook her head doubtingly.

'If my heart could speak, I would tell you of my gratitude, and would stay. But everything tells me that I must go. While I am with you, I feel that Jerome has the right to claim my obedience. I cannot give him that right any longer. Whatever happens now, I will never marry him until his father consents. If you find my logic hard to understand, remember that it is

a woman's logic, and forgive me. I have done many things for his sake since I left London; but I can do no more. I owe it to myself; the least debt that I can pay now to my womanhood.'

Madame heard her quietly. She nodded her head as though she understood the argument, but did not mean to be convinced by it.

'Ah!' she exclaimed at last, 'there are days when we all talk like that. I have been through the same thing, my child, and I know. A hundred years ago the fathers chose the wives, and the sons chose the less desirable acquaintances. To-day, the sons choose the wives, and the fathers take the others. If you were not a Berthier I would not keep you a day in my house. Be proud of your name, my dear; remember that your fathers were once the friends of kings. You talk of obligation. What obligation can there be to a man you would make happy? These people object to a marriage because they have their little ends to gain. They would find a wife for Jerome and make him miserable for the rest of his days, because Prince This wants the forest now owned by Prince That. Our affections are our property, to deal with them as we please. If they are not the gift of God, then there is nothing but evil in the world. Will you believe that, dear?'

'I could not believe it—I know that it is not true. And yet there is sacrifice too. Even the meanest of us may be called upon to sacrifice something.

'Do not delude yourself with anything so foolish, little girl. Those who are never willing to give anything themselves are the first to speak of sacrifice. The man that marries Féo de Berthier is a lucky fellow. Oh, I shall find a husband for her! The Archduke will help me when I ask him. You need to be old, my child, to know how to answer a vain man's "no." They always begin as this man has begun—a little debt to their pride of self, and then a larger debt to their pride of generosity. When the letter came yesterday——'

'The letter?'

'Certainly, the letter from Vienna which commanded Jerome to return—when it came, I said that it was the beginning of the end. This morning there is a telegram. Our boy has gone to Pontarlier to answer it now. But he will not return to Vienna, and in a week he will be your husband. Do not contradict me, child. I have said it, and I am mistress in this house.'

Féo heard her with astonishment. She knew nothing of the letter or the telegram. But she did not pursue the question, for the maids came

to lay *déjeuner*, and Victorine returned breathlessly to the arbour with letters for them all.

'Three for Françoise, the lucky girl! That's a bill, and it must be for aunt; here's one for Michel, who can't read it. Poor little me, there's only a post-card, and I know that comes from the library before I look at it. That's yours, Féo.'

Féo took her letter with some anxiety. She knew that her father had written it almost before she saw the postmark. The cramped, almost illegible handwriting brought before her an unwelcome vision of the past she would have forgotten. The old life, the life of stress and poverty, and complaint unceasing, could thus intrude even upon that haven of rest and of affection. Her hands trembled as she dragged the paper from the envelope and began to read that strange appeal. Her father was in London, then—at the old lodging in Oxford Street. Under other circumstances his lofty rhetoric and impassioned appeals would have amused her. But she recalled in that instance his solitude of life, the claim he had upon her in spite of all. Destiny was hard indeed when it robbed a child of the right to love its own father, she thought.

'MY DAUGHTER,—It will, no doubt, be a little

thing to you that an old man, too proud to ask anything but obedience of his child, should trouble you any more with any affairs of his. If he does so, it is a father's hand which holds the pen, a father's voice which dictates the words. Féo, I am alone, I am old ; if my immediate necessities have been relieved by kind friends, poverty none the less must be the handmaiden of those years—few as I can expect them to be—which lie between me and the grave. Of this I do not complain. I can face the battle now as I have faced it before. Ingratitude will ally itself to the forces of the enemy. I care nothing for that, but only for the road to which avarice and evil ambition are leading my beloved child. A man's tears are precious things. I have shed them for my daughter. Féo, must I die alone, one whom the world honoured ? Is there no pity for the broken fortunes of this friendless old man who has sacrificed so much for you ? Think well upon it. The responsibility is yours. Mine is the love and the self-sacrifice and the sorrow for my offspring.

‘GEORGES DE BERTHIER.’

The signature was a great scrawl covering the breadth of the paper. Féo noticed the care with which the letter had been folded and sealed. She would have given much to believe that one single

sentiment, even one word of love in all that strange appeal had been spoken from the heart of the writer. There was no fact of her life so powerful to compel grief as the relentless logic which could read through this pretence and sham, and forbid her again to have any faith when her father spoke. No sacrifice, she thought, would have been too great to win one hour of his affection, one true moment of pride in his life, and trust in him. But she understood now that sacrifice and charity were alike unavailing. He had written the letter surrounded by those very luxuries for which he would have sold her honour. All else she could have forgiven; but that was the crime against her which even her desire of love might never excuse. She must be alone to her life's end. While she had money, she would send it to him; but she would never see him again nor remember that she was his daughter.

Madame la Comtesse had watched her closely while she read the letter, and afterwards, when she sat with it crumpled in her hand, and gazed with tear-dewed eyes over the sunny valley and the sleeping villages. Georges de Berthier was no stranger to one of whom music had made so zealous a pilgrim. Madame knew his story, his character, his past. And her quick wit could

almost read the contents of the appeal which troubled Féo with such dark memories.

'You are to go back to London, eh, my dear? Is not that what he wants? They have paid him a thousand pounds to leave France, and will give him another when our boy is married. Don't be frightened to speak to me. I know Georges de Berthier,—none better. While you can be of use to him he will remember that you are his daughter. When you are no longer of use he will forget that he has a child. Do not think or speak of it, little Féo. There are things we must not say. We cry over them, but breaking our hearts won't change them. Tear the letter up and try to believe that it was never written.'

'That's what I do with my bills,' said Victorine, interposing audaciously.

'Ah, ungrateful one, and a poor old woman has to pay them. But we shall not think of anything sad this morning, for our little invalid is in the sunshine. Come, my child, you must find a smile for that pretty face. You would not have him see you with tears in your eyes.'

'They're always kind to you when you cry, aunt,' exclaimed Victorine.

Féo's eyes brightened suddenly.

'You are a philosopher, Victorine,' she answered, 'and here is Jerome.'

CHAPTER XXV

THE SECRET

HE rode a good grey horse at a swinging trot, and waved his whip cheerily when he saw Féo at the door of the tent. His dress was a dark-blue riding-coat with brown kharki breeches and high brown boots. His spurs and the silver knob of his hunting-crop caught the sun's rays and held them an instant in flashing lights. Féo said that she had never seen a man who sat a horse so well or with so little effort. Mere physical supremacy appealed to her in such moments as these. She had a great pride in Jerome's magnificent strength, as, at other times, his mastery of will fascinated her. The battle between them was so unequal, the contention so one-sided. Alone and far from him, she won the victory of self. But when he came to her, she knew that she must surrender as a child to one in authority.

'How well he rides!' said Victorine, watching him delightedly. 'Paul used to look unhappy

on a horse. I told him so once, and he was cross; but we made it up afterwards when I said that he shot splendidly. Don't you think we ought to go away, aunt?'

Madame nodded her head sagaciously.

'They will have all their lives, my dear—they will not grudge us these little minutes. How grave the boy looks! I wonder what new trouble he brings now.'

Féo, too, had noticed that unaccustomed gravity, and it banished the smile from her own face.

'I hope there is no bad news,' she exclaimed.

'Take no notice of it, child—we cannot always be laughing. He is grave because you do not run down to meet him. Ah, Prince! you have come, then.'

Jerome leaped lightly from his horse and tethered him to the tent pole. His salute to madame was a kiss upon both cheeks; and then, kneeling swiftly at Féo's side, he put his arm about her and raised her up until their lips met.

'Dear Féo,' he said, 'there is sunshine, indeed, when I find you in the gardens. I have counted the minutes. I did not know it would be to-day.'

'Always of me, dearest—and yet, I have counted the minutes, too.'

She spoke almost in a whisper, lying in his arms as though that rest she had sought so wearily was there to be found. But her next question was an anxious one.

'You have heard some bad news to-day—we said so as you rode up. Am I not to know?'

'You are to know nothing except that the sun shines and the sky is blue. What bad news could I have heard when Féo is getting well again?'

He made a pretence of laughing at it, and stood up to exchange a word with madame.

'Everything goes splendidly,' he said. 'My father is now in the irresponsible stage. Convalescence comes afterwards. I have telegraphed to-day resigning my commission in the Cuirassiers. That means that they cannot call me back to Vienna for any military service. The next step will be to bring my father from Karlsbad to Pontarlier—where he will apologise to us all and admit that he has been very foolish. You see they play this game with naked foils. I must play it in the same way—since it is a matter of life or death to me. When the game is over, the Archduke will have enjoyed it as much as any one. He is very fond of excitement, and I am supplying him with plenty of it.'

Madame heard the confession with delight.

'And the men—have they been here again? Is Captain Lamberg still at Boveresse?'

'I am afraid I have too little anxiety on the point. One thing is certain: he will know better than to come to the Château de Joux. I have ceased to interest myself in his movements—principally, perhaps, because I am very hungry.'

Madame clapped her hands for the servants.

'My poor boy,' she exclaimed, 'it is nearly one o'clock, and we are all fasting. What a selfish old woman I am to starve my hungry children!'

They sat at table, Jerome so close to Féo's low chair that he could hold her hand in his and whisper a word to bring gratitude to her eyes. All about them the scene was of summer at her zenith. The gaunt pines swayed to the gentlest breezes; sheep bells tinkled upon the pastures of the valley; oxen drew the wagons leisurely, as though the stress of labour were unknown in that fair land. Away in the hills the shepherds basked in the shadow of crag and tree, and forgot the lagging hours and the labour of the night. There was the shimmer of heat in the air. Fleecy vapours found their resting-places about the green summits of the higher peaks. So silent, so full of the sense of rest was it all that a man speaking upon the river's bank below sent echoes

flying to the gorges of the pass. The eye wearied of the beauty of the prospect and turned to the nearer shadows and the arbours where the sunlight was not.

In silence for the most part, the *déjeuner* was taken. Victorine, discreet always, turned her back upon Féo and fixed her eyes upon the valley road. Madame was busy with a full plate and her glass of white wine. Jerome, a little abstracted still, waited until the repast was done before seeking that explanation which he now felt to be Féo's due. She, in turn, watched him anxiously. There was a subtle change in his manner which she could not wholly understand. She set it down to her own scruples; and she could not conceal it from herself that the consequences of her action were likely to demand a heavy penalty.

'You have something to tell me, dear,' she said, when at last they were alone together. 'I have known since I saw you at the lodge gates. Is it too dreadful, or may I hear it now?'

He turned his chair and sat playing with her pretty hair and the ribbon which tied it.

'I can't explain to-day, Féo. If there were anything serious, I should feel it right to speak. But there never is anything serious in these

matters, if one can only look at them properly. What I feel most is your own confession to me when we were driving back from Boveresse. I had never thought of it in that light. A man in love is a very selfish person. He will not hear the other side. It should have been clear to me that your self-respect was in question when I asked you to come back. Frankly, I had never thought of it until you spoke. But I see it now as you see it, and I mean to act up to it. My father will give his consent, and that will end the difficulty. There can be no other solution; I do not intend that there shall be any other.'

Féo was silent a little while. She had won her point; but the victory might cost her the happiness of her life.

'What people call the best thing is often the right thing,' she said after a little pause. 'We owe something to the opinion of others and to their feelings. The "original" person is sometimes only a very selfish person. Some day, Jerome, we may be glad that all this happened.'

'Of course we shall be. I don't agree altogether with your views on originality, but I am not going to argue with my little girl to-day. If there had never been any original persons in the world, you and I might be going about now with bows and

arrows in our hands. I am original enough to believe that if a man loves a woman and is sure of her love in return, he owes neither reason nor apology to any living creature. Why should we ask the permission for surrendering to the best impulses of our nature? If we apologise for those impulses, we seem to be ashamed of them. When I am ashamed of my love for you, I will make excuses for it. We shall be very old then, *mignonne*.'

'And serious?'

'We shall not be less serious because we know how to laugh. Your solemn person is generally a humbug. He is solemn because he is thinking of his sins. And we have no sins to think of?'

'None that I would not speak of gladly to you.'

'Nor I, dear.'

They understood, mutually, the implication of that confession; and the strength of the bond between them seemed the greater for it. Her cheek pressed close to his when next she asked a question.

'And this is all your news, Jerome?'

'What else could there be?'

'I do not know—and yet——'

'And yet—and yet—we do not believe. Is not faith a virtue?'

'And foresight equally.'

'You imagine troubles. Every one does that. The trouble is the imagination.'

'I will try to believe it.'

'And will not worry?'

'Why should I?'

'There is no possible reason. Here is the doctor come to tell you so.'

He heard the doctor's buggy as it rattled upon the gravel of the avenue; and a moment later the cheery voice of the bustling little man, who lost no time in upbraiding his patient.

'Come, come, come, not indoors yet, mademoiselle! God bless me, what are the children thinking of! Upstairs, young lady, at once. The physicians of Paris might let you sit here and die; but I am only an old country doctor, and I say, Go in, go in.'

Féo laughed.

'I will tell the physicians of Paris some day, doctor.'

'Of course you shall. Give them Léon Oster's compliments, and say that they are all fools. Physic, mademoiselle, there is nothing new in physic. The ancients knew more about it than we do. We can saw and cut—what's that! But we haven't found the Elixir of Life,—not at all. Bed, rest, those are my elixirs. When my patients

are reasonable, I cure them. It is the unreasonable person who dies, mademoiselle.'

'Then I will be very reasonable, doctor.'

'And permit this young gentleman to carry you upstairs. I prescribe it, mademoiselle,—it is my treatment.'

There was a twinkle in the doctor's eye when he spoke, and Jerome, quick to appreciate the humour of it, picked up Féo in his arms and carried her swiftly to the house.

'You have registered me?' she asked.

'Through to Vienna, and no customs.'

He left her in her pretty boudoir; and a little later on she was at the window, waving a farewell to him as he rode down to Pontarlier again. She understood vaguely that he thought to serve her by staying in the town rather than at the château; and she appreciated the delicacy of his thought. But Victorine, chattering always, was there with another reason.

'They say that Captain Lamberg is still at Boveresse,' she exclaimed, when the horse and rider were hidden by the first of the pine woods. 'I don't like that, Féo. And aunt says they will fight. Of course she says so; she's always imagining horrible things.'

Féo turned quickly; she lost the colour which the gardens had given her.

'I had never thought of that,' she exclaimed.

'And there's no reason to think of it. I'm sure it's nonsense if *ma tante* says it.'

But Féo was silent. The secret which Jerome had hidden from her was revealed in that moment. A terrible secret she thought it. He would give his life for her good name.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SHADOW

A STILL night without cloud to veil its glittering world of stars, followed upon the heat of the day. From her windows Féo could see the valley and the white villages, and the cluster of lights which stood for Pontarlier; but the scene no longer suggested to her that content of life she had wished for when first her eyes beheld it. It was as though the irony of circumstance, which had attended these later days, threatened to rob her of that good common sense which once had been her richest possession. Too much the mistress of herself to be the victim of panic or of any unreasoned impulse, nevertheless the momentous news, which the day had brought, was beyond her capacity for patience or even for any abiding resolution. Her own folly, she said, had culminated in this greater folly—that Jerome's life was staked as the price of it. Not for a moment would she credit the voluble deceptions with which Victorine had sought to make light of

the affair. There had been many witnesses of Lamberg's punishment. A blow had been struck ; a challenge had been given. She understood that one answer alone could satisfy the honour of the men who thus had come face to face at Boveresse.

This truth, and this truth clear above others was the gift of those silent hours. Whatever tragedy befell, she was the cause of it. Had Frenchmen been concerned, a humour of the situation might have combated its inevitableness. But these were Cuirassiers of the Austrian Guard. She had not lived a year and more in Vienna to be ignorant of the graver stories which contributed to the history of the duel in Austria. Even among her own friends she could recall the name of one, Rupert Leginski, a captain of artillery, who had been shot for a word, and whose body had been lifted into a carriage at the very moment when she herself was riding her pony in the Prater. These men were no heroes for the satirists and the makers of toy swords. The day upon which they came face to face again might change the whole course of her life. She did not, perhaps, realise all that such a day would mean ; but a shadow of the peril attended her through the long night and hovered about her while she slept. One would emerge from that

encounter. She dared not tell herself that it might not be Jerome.

Suspense and doubt banished sleep from her eyes. She dressed herself laboriously as soon as there was any sound of life about the house ; and begging help of the maids, she went out to the gardens at the first of the day. Even Victorine was not up then. In the gardens the men were at work under the quiet directions of old Michel. A delicious balmy odour came upon the air of morning. Great drops of crystal dew dripped from the luscious buds ; the flowers opened their petals to the sun and the breeze. All the luxury of the great château, the refinement of the life there, the splendid tradition of the family, the dignity attending the household, had become part of her life now. When the others were with her, when she listened to Jerome's irrefutable optimism, she could forget that the day might be near when she must quit a haven so generous and return to that penurious existence which had been her lot almost from her childhood. The weeks of content she had known would make such a return very difficult. The stress and struggle were not so much her fear as that sordid poverty, that shaming environment, that pitiful aping of respectability which her career demanded, and to which, for the sake of her art, she had submitted. The humblest cottage in all

that valley, the hut of the shepherd, the little chalet where the gardeners lived—she would have named any of these a palace if therein a home might be found for her, and she might bid farewell to the garrets of the cities and the ambition which had sent her to the garrets. Yet fate had willed it otherwise. The net which destiny drew about her prisoned her more surely every hour. Once, as she watched the awaking pastures and the splendour of the day down there in the sunlit valley, she told herself that the meeting might have taken place already, and the news of it be known. The probability that such was the case grew upon her from minute to minute. She could not, despite her resolution, speak of anything else when madame, hearing of her escapade, came reproachfully to the gardens and began to upbraid her.

‘Victorine has told me,’ was her defence. ‘I could not sleep, and Françoise helped me out here. You must not be cross. Doctors are always so silly. And of course I am very anxious——’

Madame, to whom the idea of a duel was as the very essence of that drama she loved, affected great surprise.

‘You are foolish, child, to listen to such a story,’ she exclaimed. ‘Do not believe it. As if Jerome had not something else to think about,—

a self-willed little girl, to begin with. Ah, my dear, the times are changed indeed. I remember when General Moray went out with the Count of Traves because I wouldn't have him, and do you think that I was anxious? My word, I laughed when they told me. I was so proud that day I could not walk. You should be pleased and proud too—the foolish fellows will not hurt each other; they never do.'

Féo heard her impatiently.

'If I had thought about it, I should have known it from the first,' she said, as one convinced unwillingly. 'When Jerome came to Boveresse he struck Captain Lamberg with his whip. They said something to each other, but I was so glad to be in the dog-cart that I did not listen. I have lived too long in Austria to expect them to be sensible. If they were Englishmen, it would be different. You do not know how much I wish sometimes that Jerome had no honour. Every day it compels him to do something or not to do it. It is too subtle for me to understand. If I did not love him, I would say that it is too ridiculous.'

Madame followed the confession with difficulty.

'Ah,' she said, 'men have so much to live for, child. Your poet, Shakespeare, has said it better than you or I will ever say it. A woman's love

is her little kingdom, but the man's world is very wide. If I thought that our boy was in any danger, do you think that I could sit here, at the door of my own house, and leave him to others? Do not believe it. He is a Hapsburg, and the man who has sent him a challenge is not likely to forget it.'

And then she added—

'You must not complain because we quarrel sometimes with your English ideas. You are very cold-blooded in England, my dear. You think only of the money. At heart human nature is much the same all the world over; but a woman's instincts are surer than a man's, and a woman's instinct tells me now that Jerome has done well to meet his enemies and to show them that he is not afraid.'

Féo caught the admission instantly.

'He is to meet him, then. What else am I to think? You keep it from me, and you know.'

'I know nothing, my child—it is always best to know nothing when men wish to quarrel. You cannot help them and you cannot prevent them—or if you do prevent them, they will not love you for it. Be sure that it is not little Féo's fault. She has nothing to blame herself for. If it had not been for her, it would have been for another. We are in a country where these things are

inevitable. Men grow to manhood upon them and are the better men because of them. You will be glad to-morrow when he comes to tell you all about it.'

'I should be ashamed of myself if I were. Oh, you cannot realise what I think and feel! His life is at stake—his life. I remember nothing else. He came to Pontarlier for my sake. He is here to help me. If anything should happen—if it happened while we were speaking of it this morning—how could I forgive myself?'

Her grief was very real, but it did not touch the heart of one who could turn the pages of her memory back to twenty such affairs as this, and recall the part she had delighted to play in them.

'No, no,' she protested unsympathetically, 'women make the tragedies, little Féo—not the men. I have seen so many. It is always the old story—they will do anything for us if we do not ask them. And Jerome was born with a silver spoon. There will be no duel to-day, my child, for the servant does not fight the master; and our boy is still the master, whatever else has happened.'

This, and much more to the same end, was the consolation she vouchsafed. Capable of certain sentimental affections, the capacity, nevertheless,

rightly to read the heart of this English girl she had befriended was wanting to her. She had helped Jerome because of the position he held at the Court of Austria, and the European publicity which she knew must ultimately attend this affair. To Féo's future she did not give a thought. The girl would be morganatically married, perhaps, and afterwards disappear as so many others, whose names she could recall in her own life's story, had disappeared and been forgotten. For the rest, it sufficed that her old age had contrived yet another intrigue of which she might be the heart and impulse. Excitement was as necessary to her years as rouge to an actress. It made her young again, and in the rejuvenescence robbed her of the will to befriend or sympathise.

But Féo desired neither sympathy nor consolation. A feverish unrest possessed her. In spite of all argument, she held to the belief that this day would not draw to its close as it had begun. And, above all, she blamed herself unceasingly because she had been content to deceive herself with the happiness she had found at the château: and to crave of it a hope of the future to which she had no possible claim.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VISION

SHE had a foreboding of the day ; but it was not justified, for a messenger rode up to the château at sunset and carried a letter from Jerome. He had been detained, he said, at Pontarlier by telegrams from his father, who was betraying some glimmerings of reason, and who had already proposed a truce. To-morrow, if that were possible, he, himself, would be at Joux to breakfast, with much to speak of, and better news than he imagined possible yesterday. But she must not worry if he did not come, and she might be sure that all was well with him. For the rest, he spoke of commonplace things ; of the need that she should take care of herself, and obey the doctor implicitly ; and she could read in these injunctions the desire to keep from her suspicion of graver fears. But she did not speak to madame of the letter ; nor would she trouble them again with her own apprehensions. A woman's weakness in such an hour had ever seemed to her a

contemptible thing. She must endure in silence, as in silence she must suffer.

The letter came at sunset, and there was a second to the same end upon the breakfast-table next morning. He would come that afternoon if possible ; but he had heard from Vienna news which could not fail to be welcome to them. The Archduke was content with his ambassador no longer. Another, the Count of Travna, had left the capital, and was then upon his way to Pontarlier. That final understanding they both desired so ardently, could not now be long delayed. For better for worse, an arrangement must be found within the week. Jerome did not doubt that it would mean great happiness for them both ; and be the reward of these pitiful weeks of intrigue and of humiliation.

Féo read the letter twice. She dared not believe now either in his optimism or in any hope of better fortune for herself. Whatever else this new trouble had done for her, at least it had permitted her to forget her own hurt, and to say that she was almost well again. The second day found her laughing at the astonishment of the little doctor from Andelot. She began to seek her old solitudes in the gardens of the château ; she even thought, in a moment of earnest desire to know the truth, that she might persuade César to drive

her down to Pontarlier, where she would find Jerome and tell him of her own resolutions.

But César was obdurate, and Victorine, her faithful ambassador always, must serve in her stead. Every hour Victorine would come in with some shred of gossip torn from a willing serving-man, or heard by the maid Françoise in her excursions to the town. Boveresse had made the affair its own. Rightly, then, did Françoise gloat over her tidings.

'The Captain is still at Boveresse, mademoiselle. He has been ill ; he would not show himself at the hotel. He was to have gone out yesterday, but at the last moment he sent a message. I spoke to Maître Belard, and he knows of things. It may be to-morrow, and it may be the day after. He is very angry, the Captain, and he will hear of nothing else.'

Victorine, half afraid of the news, yet glad to carry it to Féo, was almost serious for the first time in her life.

'He is not going ; he is a coward. Françoise has told me ; he thinks that he is ill, and we can laugh at him. César's brother was at Boveresse yesterday, and heard it all. Maître Belard declares that he will go off to Paris, and that there will not be any duel at all. I don't believe that, but perhaps it's true. Oh, how glad I am ! And

we shall know soon. It must be to-morrow—must—must. And you won't think about it, Féo? You promised me.'

Féo smiled in spite of her thoughts.

'That would be so easy, Victorine. Of course I am not interested at all.'

'Oh, but it's different now! What has Jerome to fear from a coward? *Ma tante* says that the Captain dare not harm him. Wouldn't I like Paul to fight with a coward! And just think, to-morrow we shall hear all about it; we shall have nothing more to bother us, and we'll have a picnic to the Cascades. I'll try to believe that Paul is here, and go off all by myself just as we used to.'

'That would be a lonely walk, dear. But, of course, you do not mean it. If I were afraid for Jerome, it would be different; but can one be afraid for a man one really loves? I don't think so. And I don't believe that Captain Lamberg is a coward. It is the uncertainty of it all that makes it so horrible. I am beginning to wish that I had wings, and could say, "London," as they used to in the story-books. Where shall I be next week? Ah, Victorine, you have never had to ask yourself a question like that!'

'Oh, but haven't I? Where shall I be next week? Why here, watching you and Jerome in the woods.'

She sighed, and putting her arm through her friend's, began to walk across the sunny lawn to the door of the château.

'Some day we will go to London together, Féo. When you are married, I will come and stop with you. Paul will be there; you will ask him for my sake. And aunt will have to stop at the château. We will tell her there are no spare bedrooms. All the people who don't want her say that. I shouldn't enjoy myself a bit if she were there, and I am tired, oh! so tired, of being a good little dog that every one leads about with a string. Won't you promise me, Féo?'

Féo kissed her.

'We are two children dreaming our dreams,' she said. 'Who knows that I shall ever see you again when I have left France? And I must leave it now. I have no longer the excuse of illness. When next you hear of me, Victorine, I shall be in gloomy old London, a singer about whom no one cares—a drudge who has no home. But I shall never forget my friends at the château, never, never. I think that I began to live on the day when first I saw these gardens. It will be hard to leave them, harder than you can believe.'

The note of sorrow in her voice touched the child's good heart. She clung the closer to her friend and kissed her cheek.

'I shall come to you, Féo, wherever you are,' she said gently; 'if you will let me, I will never have another friend. And, of course, it's all silly. You are not going to gloomy old London, and you will not be a drudge. Jerome will be here to-morrow, and then—and then——'

Féo did not answer her. That clear girlish voice seemed to have lost its music in the thought of the day, so soon to come, when she would hear it no more. Yet the promise of friendship was very dear to her. It would be something to remember, in the lonely pilgrimage she must make, that one at least in distant France held her name in loving remembrance. And she had no doubt of her future now. Had it not been for this unforeseen folly, which harassed her unceasingly, she would have quitted the château that very night. The determination to sacrifice the last of her hopes would not be contradicted by any subterfuge of her logic. She knew that she had loved wholly, unselfishly, as few women love; she realised the duty of atoning in self-abnegation for all that had been. But first she must know that Jerome had nothing more to fear at the hands of her old enemy. In graver moments she said that she must know if he lived.

She slept upon the third night with this

resolution of sacrifice as her solace. The crisis of her life had been so prolonged, that any course which finally would determine its issues could not fail to be welcome to her. In her dreams she took the resolution anew ; and so upheld it that she found herself alone in London again in the old house in Oxford Street ; and there she waged the war of existence, as she had waged it in the weary years, without hope or ambition, or even consolation of her art.

It was an odd dream, and when she waked from sleep and knew that she was still in the great bedroom of the château, and could see the moonlight shining upon the gardens, the reality was the harder to face, the sacrifice seemed greater than any she could contemplate. When she slept for the second time, her dream carried her to the woods about the house ; and she walked there, alone, from lake to lake of the golden light ; and all the gnarled trunks were as mighty shadows stretching out their arms to her ; and in the heart of the thickets the silver beams showed her bowers as of some fairy land, and all the figures of the children's books.

Here she would have rested awhile, but, even as she stood, a hand touched hers, and led her onward until a white mist, as of silver spray, rose up above the hollow of the glade, and the forest

scene was hidden from her sight. For a moment of time a gentle breeze of night scattered the mist, and permitted the vision of the dream to torment her. She perceived two figures in the glade, and one was the figure of Jerome. Then she knew that she had come to the scene of the duel, and a great impulse to run there and to throw herself at her lover's feet would have prevailed but for the ghostly hand, which held her to the place. In vain she listened for any sound of voices in the hollow, even for the sound of one blade of steel upon another; but the silence of the fuller night prevailed; and as she stood, trembling and afraid, the curtain of the mist was raised for a second time, and she beheld a man lying prone upon the grass, and she knew that he was dead. But the face of the man was hidden from her, and while she strove with all her strength to release herself from the grip of the hand which restrained her, she awoke, and the rays of the morning sun were shining full upon her face.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE HOLLOW OF THE GLADE

WITH all her artistic impulse and capacity for deep emotion, Féo believed herself to be above the childish superstitions which are the amusement of many of her sisters ; and her first act upon waking was to laugh at her dream, and to run to the window to drink in a full breath of the invigorating breeze of day, and there to tell herself she would be a child to give any heed to that which sleep had compelled her to suffer. All that woodland scene waking now to the heralds of the sun, the great domed hills created out of the scattered vapours and the uplifted clouds, the roses diademed with dew, the wood bird's tuneful note, were a mock upon her dream. Nevertheless, the reality of the impression it had left was not to be avoided. Standing there at her window, she could recall every incident, even the most trifling, of the vision she had seen. The glade, the shadowy figures, the hand which held her back, the curtain of mist, before all the dead

man upon the ground—she beheld these things again, and they chilled the new courage which the sun had given her. How, she asked, if this were one of those dreams in which sleep had carried the first message of truth, and day had vindicated the night? And who was the man who lay dead in the hollow of the lake—the man whose figure had been hidden by another, whose face she might not look upon? As in some weird inspiration, she seemed to read a truth. Jerome was dead. Because of his death she dreamed. She would hear the story that very morning. Of death alone such a dream could speak.

Very quietly, yet with beating heart and dry, parched lips, she began to dress herself. She would not repeat her arguments, for they seemed to her to be final. Jerome had met Otto Lamberg in the glade of the woods, and had been killed there. She dared not ask herself what such a tragedy really meant to her. Her strength and clarity of purpose increased with her apprehensions. Never once now did she pause to say that all this was childish fear, to be forgotten when the hour of it had passed. That, which was but assumption at first, became conviction beyond question with every minute of delay. Jerome was dead. She knew the manner of his

death. He had died because of his great love for her. A thousand times was she alone now. His farewell to her upon that sunny morning, when they had carried her to the gardens, was the last word she would hear from his lips. This dream of night was the inheritance of her love, the harvest of her years of sorrow.

It was very early in the morning then, and even the gardeners had not come out of their cottages. The château itself gave echoes of her footsteps when she descended the great staircase and drew back the bolts of the folding doors. Dazzling particles of golden dust hung in the path of the sunbeams. Forgotten things of yesterday were littered about the hall and the rooms opening from it. She could see the open piano in the darkened boudoir, with the very music she had sung last night. A hound stretched himself as she came down, and approached her fawningly. The sound of the opening doors echoed through the silent corridors as the doors of a prison rusting upon their hinges. Outside in the sunshine she breathed a full breath for the first time. Under other circumstances the joy of that hour had been to her as riches from the treasury of being; but to-day she did not know that the sun shone, or that dew sparkled upon the flowers. She must

go down to the glade, must destroy the impression the dream had left. If Jerome were dead, none should keep the truth from her. And yet she could say in the same breath that the truth was already known, for sleep had betrayed it.

A stable-boy was busy in the stables when she knocked timidly at the door, and he rubbed his sleepy eyes and stared long at her when she asked him to saddle Christobel, and to bring the mare out immediately.

'I am going for a little ride,' she said; 'Mademoiselle Victorine will follow me directly she is dressed. We do not want any one with us, for we shall not leave the park. Be quick, please, for I must not catch cold.'

The boy said, 'Certainly, mademoiselle,' and began to busy himself with the bridle. She thought that the minutes of waiting were an age. When the horse was ready, and she sprung to the saddle, she used her whip almost for the first time in her life. She must know—must—must. The fresh air intoxicated her with a feverish impulse to settle the dreadful doubt upon the instant. In her heart of hearts she believed that a dead man lay even then in the glade. The willing horse could not keep pace with her desire to know. It was a mad gallop, a wild ride across the spongy, yielding turf,—

hither, thither; for she had no sure knowledge where to turn, or how most quickly to find the glade of her dreams.

The vision had shown her a lake with an avenue leading up to it; and, upon the left hand of the avenue, a wooded hollow. She was sure that she had ridden with Victorine to the scene of the tragedy she had witnessed in her dream; but now, being abroad in the park, she had no certain guide, no landmark which would enable her to identify the place. Twice she skirted the entire eastern wall of the outer grounds, but could espy neither a lake nor the avenue by which it was to be approached. Reining in her good horse at last, she quitted the woods of the château at their farthest extremity, and struck the road to Boveresse.

The hollow lay beyond the gates, it must lie there; sleep had not deceived her, for she could remember distinctly the day when she and Victorine had stood by a silent pool to watch the dog's-eared lilies floating upon its unruffled waters, and the great carp asleep in the sunshine. That pool she would discover again. She knew that the quest of it was folly; but went there, nevertheless, with beating heart, and hands that trembled upon her reins.

There were few upon the road: an old priest

going up to the hills to say mass for the shepherds; a lad tending oxen; some big-limbed women on their way to market; a sleepy waggoner with a great load of hay. They gave her 'Good-day' as she passed them, and turned their heads to watch that graceful figure which seemed poised upon the horse as a fragile burden scarce to be reckoned with. 'Mademoiselle from England,' they said, 'she rides early; but then, we have heard the story.' The priest alone was troubled to see her there. 'If that rascal Belard has not lied, she knows what is to happen to-day, and is going to prevent it,' he said to himself; and then he added, 'Well, it is not my affair,' and went on toward his little wooden church high up on the grassy slopes of the mountain pastures. But Féo remained unconscious of the admiration and of the good priest's doubt. She could discern the red roofs of Boveresse now—even the little railway station; and in one of those curious reactions of the mind which the most trivial circumstance may provoke, she lived again for an instant through that hour of peril when she had leaped from the train and had heard the voices upon the embankment and seen the torches of the villagers. It was the sensation of a moment, but very real while it endured. When she had forgotten it, she was at

the turn of the road which led up through the gorge of the cliff; and there she found, not the glade of her sleep, nor any figures of the mist, but a carriage lacking a wheel, and a white-haired old gentleman, who stood at the roadside, surveying the wreck of his equipage, and remained quite deaf to the profuse apologies of his coachman and the assurances that all would be well presently.

Féol reined in her horse—for the carriage was blocking the whole road—and regarded the scene with not a little amusement. The old gentleman, who did not appear to be hurt, was so very good-humoured at it all, the coachman so much distressed, that she wished she had been an artist to sketch the group as it stood. For a space the whole object of her excursion was forgotten; she came down to earth, as it were, before this moment of jest, and could laugh with the others at the coachman's protests. When the white-haired old man lifted his hat and spoke to her, it seemed the most natural thing for him to do. She wondered only that he should have recognised her nationality and addressed her in fluent English, for it was evident that he was not an Englishman.

'A thousand apologies,' he said, 'but I fear that our carriage is in your way.'

She answered frankly.

'Not at all, thank you. One way is as good as another to me.' And then she added, 'I see that you have had an accident.'

The coachman, who did not understand her, and thought she was reflecting upon his carriage, burst into a very torrent of protest.

'It is a good carriage, mademoiselle. The wheel has come off. Is that anything to complain of? Maître Jonart at Neufchâtel, he made the carriage; all the wheels will come off sometimes. You cannot help it.' And then he returned to his exclamations. Mother of God, was he to be blamed because this wheel came off? There would be a new wheel presently. He was going to run back to the village. He would find a wheel somewhere. Monsieur would condescend to rest upon the bank a moment. These little things happened every day. It was a good carriage—a better carriage now with three wheels than any in Pontarlier. They shake your bones there; you rattle like a dice-box. In his carriage you did not rattle even with three wheels.

There had been two passengers in the landau, and one of them, a slightly built young man with a soldier's air, who paid a great deference to his fellow-traveller, now held the horses and

tethered them at the roadside while the loquacious coachman set off to Boveresse for the necessary wheelwright. The old gentleman, meanwhile, began to question Féo.

'I think that I shall walk up,' he said; 'it cannot be far from here. Perhaps you know the house, mademoiselle. I am going to the Château de Joux.'

She laughed at the question.

'I live there,' she exclaimed; 'it is a mile from here on the hill-side.'

'Then you will show me the way?'

'Oh, of course, if you are not afraid to walk!'

'I like nothing better at this hour, and in this company.'

'But they don't expect you, and you won't find anybody up except the servants.'

'More than sufficient to make me a cup of coffee, mademoiselle.'

He turned to address a word to his companion, who answered him deferentially.

'You will find me in the gardens of the house with mademoiselle,' he said, 'when the carriage is ready, we will go on to Pontarlier.'

'Certainly, Count; I will hurry as much as possible.'

Féo caught the word Count, and looked more curiously at the man who was so called. He

was a fine, upright old fellow, with a soldier's carriage, and iron-grey hair and bushy whiskers in the Austrian fashion. His eyes betrayed a ready love of humour, and were kindly, she thought. His manner toward her was that of one accustomed to command even women; but with a grace and courtliness which made such commands welcome. She concluded, almost from the first moment of meeting him, that he was the new envoy sent by the Archduke Frederick to Pontarlier; and the humour of that encounter drove from her head all remembrance of the foolish errand which had carried her from the château at such an hour of the day.

'I suppose you travelled by the night express,' she said, as he began to walk briskly at her side upon the white road to the house.

'Yes, by the night express. I made a détour to Neuschâtel that I might see Madame la Comtesse. I have heard of you, mademoiselle; you are the young English lady staying at the house.'

The declaration was quite frank. She met it with like candour.

'And you are the Count of Travna,' she exclaimed.

He nodded his head, but turned from the question.

'You English change your habits when you are abroad,' he said. 'In London I find that everybody begins to wake up when I wish to go to bed. I was once in your Rotten Row at five o'clock, and the newspapers spoke of it. When a man gets up at five o'clock in Vienna, we do not mention it in the newspapers. You are fond of the country, Miss de Berthier?'

'So fond that I would never go into a town again if I might decide.'

'An odd ambition at your age. Most young ladies, I find, are not happy unless there are bonnet-shops. Frankly, I myself see nothing in all this—mountains, meadows, rivers. There are not men here. Life for me begins where men meet.'

'You are staunch at least, sir. Men do not always believe so much in men. And as for women, they do not believe in them at all.'

'Nevertheless, they are influenced by them.'

'When it flatters their vanity. Tell a man that your opinion is really his, and he will think that he is clever. Try to persuade him to change what he calls his mind, and he will hate you.'

The Count smiled.

'I am sure that our opinions will agree,' he exclaimed good-humouredly.

'In that case we shall begin to quarrel at once,' she answered with assumed flippancy.

He was amused at her reply, and stood a moment to survey the glorious valley below them. She, on her part, realised in a vague way that they were opponents, and that her wits must be pitted against his for a stake she could not estimate or define. The antagonism pleased her. This man, at any rate, was one whose honesty she might not doubt. There was a breadth, a dignity of manner and speech which won upon her homage.

'It is very early, as you say, Miss de Berthier, and I am afraid that I shall be a nuisance to your friends at the château. You will befriend me, I beg, and regard me as the spoil of your morning's excursion.'

'Am I to carry you in as a prisoner of war, then?'

'As a willing prisoner, if you please.'

'You are staying at Pontarlier long?'

'As long as circumstances demand my presence, but at the château no more than an hour.'

She nodded her head and began to close her hands a little nervously upon her reins. A mood defiant could not be suppressed.

'You have come to see Prince Jerome?' she exclaimed.

'Exactly; you guess my intentions perfectly. I have come to see Prince Jerome, and to accompany him to Vienna.'

Her face clouded. She looked away across the valley to the mists looming as a blue cloud above Pontarlier. In that instant the purport of her ride, the message of the dream, recurred to her with a new intensity.

'I pray God that you will find him,' she exclaimed almost involuntarily.

She had not meant to utter her thoughts aloud in this way; but so sudden was the recurrence of the idea which had driven her from the house, that the confession prevailed above her will. When next she looked at her companion, she observed that he smiled no more, but stood, very white and grave and hesitating. Her defending laugh could not efface the impression which the foolish exclamation had created.

'Miss de Berthier,' he said, 'I trust there is no ill news of the Prince?'

'None that I am aware of.'

'Forgive me, your words are a little enigmatical. Why should you hope that I will find him at Pontarlier? Is there any doubt of it?'

She sighed.

'I do not know,' she answered wearily. 'Am

I his keeper, then? It is ridiculous to ask me such questions.'

For a little way they went on together in silence. The road was arched over by trees at this place, dipping into a hollow of the glade and bordering upon a little lake which shone clear and translucent, in the shade of the umbrageous leaves. Beyond the pool a vista of thicket and hollow, and an avenue of chestnut-trees opened up to show, remoter still, the meadows of the valley and the wooden spire of a village church. Here, as by some subtle, compelling agency, Féo checked her horse abruptly. The scene of her dream rose up before her as by a magic touch. She lived in the sunshine the vision of the darkness. Neither speaking nor moving, she watched the figures, and saw that truth was the message of the night. For, all unconsciously she had stumbled upon the scene of the duel, and those that moved before her were men whose gestures she could witness and whose voices she must hear. Will as she might to laugh at it, she knew that Jerome was here in the hollow of the glade as she had beheld him in her sleep. And there were other figures, distinct and outstanding upon the verdant green. She recognised Otto Lamberg, and perceived that he held a pistol in his hand. Another,

whose face she could not see, was talking to Jerome. The sun made a silhouette of the figures and cast long shadows on the grass. She followed them as one robbed of all power to think or act or turn her eyes away. The dread of the moment surpassed all that she had suffered since the first hour of that enduring intrigue.

Count Travna had lagged behind as they entered the avenue; but now, seeing her white face and frightened eyes, he hastened to her side, and, in his turn, looked down upon the fateful scene in the hollow. He could not comprehend it immediately, nor recognise those who played so strange a part in that place; but when a minute had passed, and the sun shone out again to show the faces of the men, he uttered a startled exclamation and staggered back against her horse.

'My God!' he cried, 'they are going to fire!'

Her answer was a whisper inaudible. In her heart she believed that this was the hour of Jerome's death. The longing to run to him, to shield him, became in itself an agony. As it had befallen in the dream, so she knew that it must be now. The unendurable suspense of that moment was never to be forgotten while life remained to her. Her very heart seemed to

stand still when the men turned to face each other, and the sunbeams glinted upon the steel barrels of their pistols. Jerome would die. She thought already to see his body prone upon the sward as she had seen it in her sleep.

She thought that he must die indeed, yet no word of fear escaped her. The Count bore witness afterwards she sat with dry eyes and lips close shut, and hands that closed upon her reins tenaciously. All else—the hour, the man at her side, the hazard of her own life—were forgotten in that enthralling doubt. As one gazing entranced upon some scene of drama, she watched the moving figures, she heard the voices of the seconds—the command to fire. The leaping flame following upon the word, the loud report of a pistol as it echoed through the woods and rolled up to the hills above them, found her still voiceless. She did not heed the Count when his broken exclamations told her the story. Jerome had fired deliberately at the sky above him. The pistol in the hand of Otto Lamberg was still raised. She waited for the report of it as for a message of death inevitable. But the message lagged. For an instant the man stood irresolute. Then he threw the weapon upon the grass and walked quickly from the place.

'He has done well,' said the Count in a low voice; and so he turned to her for the first time since they had entered the avenue.

She did not answer him. Her eyes were still fixed upon the hollow. A strange light shone in them. The man wondered at her calmness, for drops of sweat stood upon his forehead, and his hand was shaking.

'You see,' he said, 'the silly business is done with. These two angry fellows will now go away to tell their friends that honour is satisfied. It appears they have amused you, Miss de Berthier.'

The blood rushed to her cheeks.

'Amused me!' she cried, and the ring of her voice was as some command to silence, almost to awe. The Count flinched at her glance. He stammered his apology.

'I am sorry,' he said quickly. 'Forget that I have spoken. Here is my carriage; perhaps you would be glad to let the lieutenant lead your horse and to ride back to the château with me.'

She did not hear him. Her horse, taking advantage of the loosened rein, began to walk briskly up the hill, while she sat as one in a trance. The Count watched her until the bend of the road hid her from his sight.

'There is a woman who knows how to suffer,' he said.

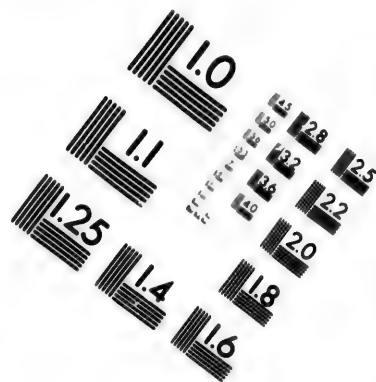
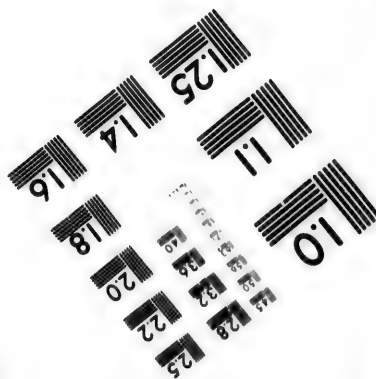
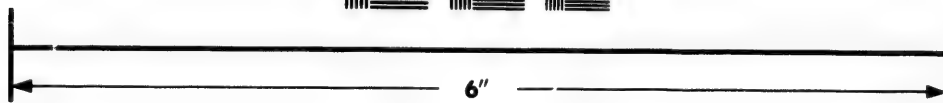
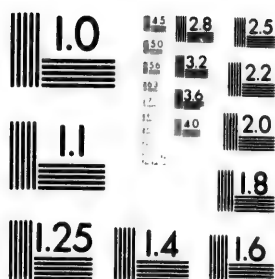


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CHAPTER XXIX

THE COUNT OF TRAVNA

FÉO rode her horse to the stable door, but did not return at once to the château. She had a vague dread of hearing any voice or of being compelled to answer any question that might be put to her. The spell of the scene she had witnessed in the glade was still upon her. The rolling report of the pistol yet echoed in her ears; the figures of the drama returned to act their parts anew and to compel her again to suffer that agonising suspense which had so tormented her in sleep and waking. In vain she told herself that Jerome lived, that the danger was no more, that all else was folly beyond words. She could not escape that penalty exacted from shattered nerves and imagination excited by long hours of uncertainty.

There were many about the grounds of the house now—gardeners and grooms and maids exchanging a word with the stable-boys. She avoided them, and ran to that little bower where,

but a few days ago, Otto Lamberg had come to her with so plausible a tale. Perchance she thought that Jerome would pass by on his way back to Pontarlier ; or would even ride in at the gates to tell her the story. A strange longing to meet him began to mingle with those haunting ideas which forbade her to be grateful to reality. His life had been given to her, she said. The jeopardy of death, it may be, had, in a measure, been hidden from her by that all-absorbing quest of truth ; but now that he lived, she realised it more truly ; and could ask herself what his death would have meant to one who had been willing to touch the nadir of poverty and of exile for his sake.

And this realisation preyed upon the very heart of her womanhood. In the gladness of truth, she could weep for that which might have been, but was not.

Jerome lived, indeed—but she knew that, henceforth, he might not live for her. The crisis of those troubled weeks had passed at last, and had left to her a future without hope, a path winding and tortuous and offering no sure haven even from the ultimate poverty she had always foreseen and dreaded. In a few hours the man, for whose safety she had prayed so ardently, would be on his way to Vienna. The hospitality

of the château would be remembered among the sunny days of an irrevocable past. She would set out to London—God knew to what destiny.

It was a strange medley of nervous excitement, of apprehension for herself, and of a woman's gladness for the life given back to her which occupied that hour of self-communing in the arbour. From her place there she could hear the commotion which the Count's arrival had already caused—the ringing of bells, the scampering of men, the shouts in the stable-yards, the grooms cantering off to the villages ; but she was content to play no part in that affair. If her own inclination had been consulted, she would have avoided the courtly old soldier who had been her friend of the morning. The plain truth, that he had come to the château as an envoy from Jerome's father, made it impossible, in her better judgment, that she should meet him. To plead her own case, or utter any word in defence of her own actions, would, she thought, be the best title these people could have to their treatment of her. She wished almost that she might leave the house upon the instant ; and, going hence, begin at once that battle with destiny which now was inevitable.

The resolution was heroic ; but she knew its impossibility ; and, anon, there came to her a

woman's curiosity to learn of that which was passing in the château. Determined still to avoid the Count, she returned to the gardens and found Victorine, who ran to her joyously, and began to tell her all the news, breathlessly, as was her wont.

'Féo—where have you been? *Ma tante* is in a dreadful state. You are to come in at once and see him. He is a great big man, and has gone upstairs to brush his whiskers; Jerome is expected to breakfast. He has promised us. His English friend came to say so. If you could see his English friend! I shall forget Paul while he is here! Oh, I must tell! All the silver is at the bankers. *Ma tante* is furious, and we are to help to cut the flowers, and it is to be magnificent. Féo, you must come in!'

She babbled on, restless and delighted with this hour of change and chatter. Féo went with hesitating steps to the house; for it seemed impossible now to avoid the encounter she had dreaded. In the *salon* upon the first floor she found madame and the Count; and so cordial was the old soldier's greeting, that her resolution was forgotten in her gratitude.

'Ha!' he cried, 'here is my little companion at last. I was beginning to think that she did not wish to see me again.'

'Tell the Count how ill you have been, child—he will understand,' exclaimed madame in her zeal to explain away all shortcomings.

Féo answered them smilingly.

'How easily do we bear the misfortunes of our neighbours. Is the Count really interested in the history of my ailments?'

Count Travna put a chair for her close to his own. She did not take it.

'I have been telling madame what we saw this morning,' he said. 'I have been saying that my young companion had more courage than a timid old man who has been at twenty such affairs.'

'The courage of ignorance, Count—why should I have been afraid?'

Madame interposed in a reproachful tone.

'Come, my dear, do not speak in that way. We know what it must have meant to you. I am sure that you are very thankful.'

Féo turned over a page of music on the piano near her. She did not perceive the drift of the old soldier's question.

'I am glad, of course, that no harm came to Prince Jerome. But you do not wish me to shout it from the housetops, Count? If men are willing to play with their lives in this way, we are not their guardians. I do not believe in scenes, and I shall remain unconverted.'

'Exactly. I agree with your philosophy, but am unable to practise it, as you were the witness.'

'Oh,' she said, 'I was far too much occupied to think of you at all! If anything had happened to Jerome——'

She stopped abruptly, conscious of a betrayal which she had wished to avoid. The Count, in his turn, desired to help her in the difficulty.

'Let us forget a very foolish affair and thank God that no harm has come of it. We are not always so fortunate in Vienna, where the price of honour is something more than a prick from a rapier. You will help me to convince the Prince that he has not done well, Miss de Berthier. I am afraid that he needs some good advice.'

Féol laughed.

'That will be a new *rôle* for me,' she answered; 'and where is the man who practises a woman's philosophy? Are you not destroying our ideals, Count?'

Madame, who had listened to them with a little impatience, made a brave effort to be practical.

'The Count has come here to see you, my dear. It is a long way from Vienna, and we must be grateful to him.'

'Grateful!'

'And what else should we be, pray?'

'He is a friend of Jerome's.'

The Count answered her.

'I hope so—and a friend of yours when you will permit me. Madame la Comtesse is good enough to say that I may stay at the château until—well, until I know that it is not necessary to stay any longer. I count upon your friendship to make the days short.'

The mood defiant came upon Féo again.

'It is August,' she said quietly. 'I believe that the sun does not set until eight o'clock, Count.'

Madame raised her hands in awe, but the old soldier laughed at the thrust.

'Come,' he said, 'a declared enemy is always an easy fellow to deal with. We shall be friends yet. My son will see to that.'

Féo started.

'Your son!'

'Yes, my son the Prince. He is coming up the drive now.'

Madame clapped her hands with delight. Féo was still looking from one to the other in questioning amazement when Jerome entered the room, and at his heels there walked her old friend Leslie Drummond.

CHAPTER XXX

THE QUESTION

Déjeuner was served at twelve o'clock in the great Hall of Mirrors, a vast apartment of the château which had not been used three times since the Empire fell. In spite of madame's apprehensions, the fame of the house suffered nothing from that display. Exquisite glass and a profusion of pure white flowers atoned for the lamented overplus of silver, then in the possession of the family bankers. The servants, awakened to new energies by the distinction of the guest, went deftly to their work. The Archduke himself, who had travelled *incognito* as the Count of Travna, and was still thus addressed, sat at the head of the table by madame's side. Jerome, a little restless and excited, made a brave effort to conceal his anxiety from Féo. Leslie Drummond, who had come to the house as by a miracle, was next to Victorine, and already teaching her those niceties of the English idiom which prevail in University towns. But the oddity of it, Féo

said, was that all met as though such a gathering had been the most natural thing in the world. The men were ignorant, she thought, that their secret was known.

'You did not tell me that your father was coming to-day,' she said to Jerome, when a babble of conversation permitted her to ask a question. He had a story ready for her.

'My father affects surprises. When he told me that he meant to send the Count of Travna here, I imagined that he would come himself. That's a little weakness for everyday drama which is characteristic of him. You will like my father, Féo.'

'Of course I shall. We have told each other already that we are enemies. That is always a good beginning.'

And then she asked, 'And Leslie, is he here also by accident?'

Jerome flushed. He was not accustomed to prevaricate, but his courage was worsted by the truth.

'He came down from Paris because I asked him. There's no one here that I know, and I wanted a friend's advice. When you introduced us in Paris I liked him. I believe he was in love with you once, Féo.'

'He loved me passionately, with the devotion

of a lifetime, for four-and-twenty hours. But he is a good friend. And, of course, he advised you wisely.'

Jerome fidgeted with his plate.

'I am glad that my father has come. It's difficult to understand people when they are a long way off. I was getting tired of writing letters, and meant to put an end to it. I dare say your friend will help me in one or two little things.'

'One or two?'

'Yes; you must see that there is a great deal to be done. I hope you will be nice to my father.'

'What a very complimentary hope! I ought to be tricked out in ribbons as a horse at a fair. Won't you lead me up and down, dear, and say, "Here is lot one"?''

And then she continued in a low voice and petulantly—

'How can I be other than I am? And what does it matter whether I am nice or not? You know that I am going to London—and should have gone there already if I had been able.'

He recognised the mood and would not strive to combat it. Conversation flagged, and Leslie Drummond addressed Féo for the second time since he had come to the house.

'I wish you'd tell me what's the French for

"proctor," Féo. I'm trying to remember that story about the man who was proctorised for falling into the gutter at Cambridge, and who said, "Save the others, I can swim." Made-moiselle doesn't understand a word of it, and it's the best French, too, out of Henri Bué's eighteen-penny primer.'

Victorine laughed, in her turn failing to comprehend more than a few words of the question.

'He has been telling me how he swam a river. I love swimming when you can have fun in the water. I wish you'd interpret for us, Féo. It's like being in a deaf and dumb asylum, where all the mutes can hear and all the deaf can speak. Oh, do tell him that I swim!'

Féo interpreted laughingly.

'You will have to teach Mr. Drummond,' she said. 'I am sure he would like to learn.'

And then to Jerome she said in a low voice—

'Behold the matron—I believe that I am going to make a match. What is it in women that delights them when they can make two people miserable? Is it instinct or inherent antipathy to the human race?'

'Neither. It is the desire to dispose of a man for whom they have no possible use. Men are more unselfish. Their capacity for admiring a large number of women at the same time leads

them to increase their amatory assets whenever possible. You don't find a man making a match unless he has daughters who are a charge upon the estate. He regards marriage as a curtailment of possibilities. And then his efforts are always maladroit—he grafts, with clumsy fingers, a rose upon thistles, and often pricks his hands.'

'You grant nothing to a woman's sentiment, then?'

'Oh, it counts, I suppose! And there is always the necessity of marrying her pretty daughter before the age of comparisons. Men view marriage from the purely commercial point of view. They are all so sensible—when they haven't to marry the girl themselves.'

She wondered at the flippancy of the talk upon such a day, and at an hour momentous for them both. That grim dawn, all the intrigue of the terrible weeks, the dark shadow of her own future were brushed aside, as it were, that these people might meet in the common way of life and seem to have no other interests than those of the uneventful years. When, at last, they rose, and Jerome found an opportunity to speak a graver word to her, she was tempted almost to answer him in the chatter of the table.

'You are going to show my father the grounds, Féo. You know what that means? He wishes

to speak to you, and you owe it to me to hear him. What you say to-day may help us or injure us for the rest of our lives. I don't ask you to make any excuse or to argue with him. But I do expect you to convince him of our sincerity.'

She breathed a little quickly, for the prospect troubled her.

'A man does not believe in a woman's sincerity because she protests it.'

'In your case, yes. No one could be with Féo for a single day and say that she was not sincere.'

'You compliment me, Jerome.'

He bent down and touched her pretty hair with his lips.

'No,' he said, 'I love you.'

'And loving me, you forgot your love to-day.'

He looked into her eyes, and read the truth there.

'You know that, Féo?'

'I know it.'

'And being reasonable, you understand that it was inevitable. He forced it upon me because he had no other course. They would have told the story in Vienna, and he would have been hounded out of the regiment. It was a silly affair, but all these affairs are silly. I never meant to fire at him, and I don't believe that he

meant to fire at me. When he threw his pistol on the grass, he was playing for promotion and orders. He's a shrewd fellow, is Otto Lamberg; but I shall never forgive my father for sending him to you. You must be more merciful, Féo. You don't know how thankful I was when I saw that it was all over. Cowardice if you like—but then, I remembered you. I saw your face all the time I was on the ground. And I knew how glad you'd be when you heard that it all ended in smoke—as it should have begun.'

'God knows how glad I was,' she said, almost in a whisper.

He kissed her for the word, and then followed the others to the garden.

'My father is clothed and in his right mind again, or he would not be here,' he said as they came out through the long window to the Italian terrace upon the eastern side of the château; 'in three days we shall forget all this and be on our way to London. Would you like to go to London, Féo?'

'I am going there to-morrow,' she said,—a word of true intent spoken as a jest.

'You are not well enough,' he answered, 'and besides, to-morrow would be premature.'

She sighed wearily.

'You know that I must go,' she said.

'I don't know anything of the sort—nor does my father. Here he is to tell you so.'

The Archduke came up to them as though by accident, and began to walk at their side. Jerome turned to speak to madame, who, fortified by dog and cushions and maid attending, was enthroned already in her great arm-chair. Victorine had taken Leslie Drummond to the harbour, and was amusing him there with a delicious oration in broken English and excited French. But Féo had never been more serious. She rebelled against the *rôle* which had been forced upon her. She determined that she, at least, would utter no word which should seem to be a defence of her own actions. And in this spirit she listened to her companion.

'My son says that you think of going to London to-morrow, Miss de Berthier. I had not heard of that intention from madame.'

'Because I have not spoken of it. I have been too long at the château already. Hospitality and imposition are never good friends, Count.'

He nodded his head.

'I trust that you will remember these days without regret. Frankly, my own intention in coming to Pontarlier was to speak to you of my son. There are other things which claim precedence, however. Believe me, I shall never

forgive myself for that grave mistake in sending to your father's house one who had neither discernment nor discretion. The wrong that has been done is the fruit of slander. I will atone for it, if it is in my power.'

He spoke with a dignity which lost nothing by confession, and in a manner which encouraged the interchange of confidences.

'It has all been a mistake from the beginning, Count,' she said almost passionately. 'The world in which you live cannot understand my world, as my world is unable to understand yours. Your lives, your ideas, your actions are upon a different plane. I have judged them by a woman's reason, and must pay the price of my ignorance.'

'As my son might be expected to pay the price of his birthright in this sacrifice. Princes are not sent into the world to a bed of roses, Miss de Berthier. I often think that evil tongues would be less evil if the whole condition of our social state were rightly understood. If much is given, much, also, is owed by such men as I am. To the country, service; to our good name, honour; to society, a respect for those great principles upon which society is constituted. If we must deny ourselves in these, the primitive things of our being, our solace is that duty demands such sacrifices of us. Such was my argument when I sent

Captain Lamberg to your house. It is not my argument to-day.'

She looked up at him wonderingly. He was very grave, and seemed to express himself with difficulty.

'My son tells me,' he continued, without waiting for her to speak, 'that your father is the Count of Mornay. There are few older families than yours in France, mademoiselle.'

The irony of the truth occurred to her.

'And few poorer, Count.'

'Ah, there is always the money!'

'Which buys hearts to make images of them and put them on your pedestals.'

'The common creed. Do not believe in it altogether. Money is as much a gift from God as love. We forget that in many of our platitudes. It is the fashion to speak of money as a cursed thing, whereas it may be one of the most blessed. Let us rule it from our argument—for money is no part of that at least. I think only of my son's happiness; I am here to promote it so far as I am able.'

She did not answer him. The thought occurred to her that she was making a poor defence of it, yet she knew not how to respond to his sincerity.

'I am here to promote my son's happiness,' he continued, 'and for that it is necessary to face the truth. Jerome has ambitions; the ambition of a

soldier less, perhaps, than that of one who would rule his father's house worthily. I cannot conceal from you that the alliance I had conceived for him is not the alliance he has proposed to me. Many of my own wishes must be sacrificed if his are to be gratified. And yet, God knows, the sacrifice is difficult. We bear a great name in Austria. I have hoped that he would help me to make it as powerful as it is great. If I forget those hopes, he, in turn, must forgo some part of that position I had designed for him. I do not doubt that he will consent willingly. Insincerity at least is not to be charged against him.'

'I am sure of that,' she said quickly; 'sincerity and the will to live for others are as natural to Jerome as sunshine to these gardens. I have known it from the beginning. If it had not been so, I should still be in London. Women are vain, Count. I believed that I was necessary to his happiness. A woman's mistake it may have been—but a mistake that can be atoned for. I cannot promise you that he will forget, for you know that he is a man who will never forget. But in so far as my own will may cease to influence him I will respect your wishes. It has been my intention for some days now to leave France, and to return to my work in London. Convince Jerome that I am right to go, and you will serve us both.

He turned to her and asked her a plain question.

'Miss de Berthier,' he said, 'you love my son?

She faltered, embarrassed and troubled as she had not been that day.

'Was it necessary to speak of that?' she exclaimed.

'We will not speak of it,' he said; 'for the rest, I respect your wishes. You shall return to London—but not to-morrow. You are not in a fit state of health for that. Seek a friend always in me. I have much to be sorry for. My debt to you is very heavy.'

The words brought them to the place where the others sat; and the Count turned to madame's chair, and so signified that their interview was at an end. When the opportunity was at hand, Jerome began to question her, and she read his anxiety in the manner of it.

'Well,' he asked impatiently, 'is it as we wish?

'It is as your father wishes.'

'And that is?

'That I am to return to London.'

'Then I shall go with you.'

She laughed.

'You know that it is out of the question.'

CHAPTER XXXI

RESOLUTION

IT was the Count's first visit to the Jura mountains, and when the heat of the day had passed, he set off with Jerome for a ride in the hills; while madame drove down to Pontarlier to see that all was done well for the reputation of her house. Eccentric and petulant as the old lady was, she had yet that inheritance of dignity and of tradition which enabled her to serve even such an occasion as this; avoiding, upon the one hand, the ostentation of display, and upon the other that familiarity of manner and speech which would have betrayed her pride in the entertainment of her guest. Féo realised then why Carlyle has said that manners died with the Revolution. The method, and order, and grace of all that was done within the house appealed to her forcibly. She recalled the millionaires' 'soirées' in London; the vulgar publicity of them; the triumphs which were the victories of mere guineas; the striving of classes to become what they never could be; and she realised that

she lived for the day at least in a different world—a world peopled with figures of the stories she had loved in her childhood, obeying a code which neither years nor money may teach; a world of old-time courtiers to whom the mantle of the past had been given. And she was about to leave that world for ever. It would remain a splendid memory for the days to come—that vista of a land in which her fathers had lived and moved, and the romance of her history had been written.

She had no hesitation now as to the strength of her own resolution. In her heart, a woman's instinct told her that Jerome would suffer as she must suffer. She had wished his happiness; but that happiness was not to be. If she could not follow altogether the Archduke's logic, she blamed herself for her want of perspicacity. Even now, when all was understood between them, the humour in which he had left her was not to be comprehended. Jerome could laugh still at her intention to go to London. His father had ridden away to the hills, promising her that when she was well enough, she should be his companion in many an excursion such as that. Madame treated her still as a foolish child, wayward and impetuous. Sometimes she doubted if these people, save Jerome alone, were sincere, either in their attitude towards her or in the wishes they

expressed. They could not know what such an hour must cost or mean to her. Their jest was with a woman's life. To-morrow, when she quitted the château, it would be a fate she dared not depict. Death would be compassion in such an hour. And she must live—must live on through the weary years when memory alone should speak of happiness or even of content.

They had left her alone in the gardens when the Archduke set off for his ride, and it was not until five o'clock that Victorine and Leslie Drummond returned from their tour of the grounds. Féo desired ardently to see Leslie, and found her opportunity when Victorine ran in to order tea, and her old friend came slouching up to her, apologetically, and not a little abashed. It was odd to meet him under such circumstances; but their relations had always been so frank and well understood that neither suffered embarrassment because of them.

'It's fate, my dear Leslie,' she said; 'wherever destiny sends me, it bids you follow. At Pontarlier, of all places, I did not expect you.'

'All the more reason why I should turn up. Your friend was in a fix and sent me a telegram. I came along because I thought that I might help you. You know how much I want to help you, Féo.'

'Of course I do. When you take Victorine for an hour's walk in the woods, you help me very much. I hope you will behave well to that poor child, Leslie.'

He flushed to the roots of his hair, and began to fumble awkwardly with his gloves.

'She's a jolly girl,' he said; 'I'll have to go and take a course in French just to talk to her. We've been doing the deaf and dumb business all the afternoon. I never knew how mutes made love until I came to Pontarlier. It seems to me they must shuffle along pretty comfortably somehow.'

'Leslie, you're a most fickle creature. Don't apologise. It's the nature of the animal. I believe you are going to fall in love with Victorine. Let me implore you to be discreet. A man who stumbles at his second fence is lost for ever. I was the first. They always clear that.'

He acquiesced bluntly.

'Let's agree to a truce,' he said; 'I shall always be your friend, Féo.'

'Of course you will; that's why I want to talk to you now. Do you know that I must go to London to-morrow—alone?'

He laughed.

'Oh, I say, that won't do! You're humbugging me.'

She remained serious.

'I am going to London to-morrow alone, and I want a ticket. There is only one friend here that I can come to, and he laughs at me. I must find another way.'

'I am to believe that you are not joking?'

'Look at me and ask yourself if I am joking.'

'But what does Jerome say about it?'

'I do not intend to consult him.'

'Oh, but I shall!'

'Not when I tell you that I do not wish it. Get me a ticket from Pontarlier to London, and I will believe what you say about our friendship.'

He turned and looked her full in the face.

'Do you mean to say that you wish to get away from here and cannot, Féo?'

'You express my wishes exactly.'

'And you are determined to go?'

'Quite determined.'

'Then I'll take you myself.'

'You will do nothing of the sort, my dear Leslie. I shall come out to the grounds to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. You will suggest driving me to the Cascades. You will take me to the station at Pontarlier, and then return to tell them what I have done. Nothing could be more simple if you are sensible.'

He debated it for a little while, walking up

and down the terrace as one in great perplexity. Then he asked her a question.

‘Why are you leaving Jerome?’

‘Because it is better that I should leave him.’

‘You have come to that conclusion properly. It isn’t a whim, or a tiff, or anything of that sort?’

‘Am I the person to indulge in whims?’

‘Not usually, but you never know what a woman will do next. Of course, if you’re serious, I am.’

‘Leslie,’ she said quietly, ‘I was never more serious in my life.’

Again he reflected a little.

‘There’s something behind this I don’t understand,’ he said; ‘but I’ll take you to London, since you mean to go.’

‘You will take me to Pontarlier,’ she exclaimed decisively; ‘it is a promise.’

Victorine ran up as she spoke, and the conversation changed abruptly. When the others returned to the château, they said that Féo had never seemed so well. And at dinner that night, and afterwards when she sang to them as she had never sung before, the spirit of sustained gaiety and of unnatural excitement was upon her.

‘Is she not splendid?’ cried madame in her delight; ‘ah, we shall find a husband for her!’

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE BREAKING DAWN

FÉO, at the window of her room, watched the dawn light breaking upon the distant mountains and the valley of pastures wherein her Eldorado had been found. She had not slept, nor thought of sleep, in those hours of tumultuous reaction and of unspoken farewell. As some child leaving a home wherein all the richest memories of her being were stored, so she prepared to quit the scene of her brief happiness and of her love-dream. Every flower in those awakening gardens, every hamlet upon that verdurous plain, had endeared itself to one who had first learned of the repose of life in that stately house. The distant city awaiting her—that very whirlpool of hope and ambition, and stress and strife, was about to draw her again to its vortex. She clung, in her heart, to this fair country, as a child to the mother that bore it. Visions of the 'might have been,' of a home in such a land with Jerome at her side, tormented her unceasingly. She stood

at her window and looked upon the east glowing with the iridescence of day, and beheld the world of nature triumphant in the hour of dawn, and asked herself what the night would mean to her. The shadow of death seemed upon the path she must follow. She could neither wholly realise the full meaning of her act, nor contemplate its consequences. She knew only that she must turn to the darkness—that the light no more would shine for her.

It was dawn when she began to prepare for her journey; but she lingered in the task, remembering that Leslie would not be ready for her until seven o'clock, and fearing to set tongues busy again if she were discovered in the gardens at so early an hour. When, at last, she thought it safe to go down, and had put together the few things she deemed indispensable to the long day before her, she opened the door of her room timidly, and stood for a moment hesitating, and almost afraid, at the head of the great staircase. Jerome's room was there. There surged up in her heart a great longing to say if it were but one word of farewell to him. Through the years to come she would hear his voice no more. The loneliness of her own future, the thought that she was as one forsaken by all the world, so warred upon her courage that she did not move from the place until minutes had passed. One word of

pity would have broken down her resolution in that moment. It was not spoken, and she went on with dry eyes—out to the gardens, to the sunshine, and the sweet air of the day.

The clocks of the house were striking half-past six when she quitted the house, and she remembered that she must wait half an hour for Leslie yet. Never had day dawned so slowly. Her love for the château, for the wooded hills, for that scene of her hopes and her dreams, impressed itself upon her with renewed strength, as the visions of that summer's day were contemplated anew. She could not leave her home, she said. The bitterness of farewell was magnified a thousand times when she whispered Jerome's name, and remembered that, as her path was, so must his be. Nevertheless, for his sake the sacrifice must be made. She prayed to God to give her courage of the hour.

One by one the minutes passed—she numbered them, walking upon the eastern terrace with impatient steps, and a brain that seemed to burn in the conflict of thought and argument. Whatever her temptations might be now, she knew that she had chosen the better part. Jerome would forget as the changing years obliterated memory and carried him onward to the summit of his ambitions. She would work and suffer—and remember. Such had been the woman's part from the beginning. Already she had, in

silence, spoken her last 'good-bye' to the friends she had found in that new home of hers. One by one, to the arbours of the gardens, to the dogs that fawned at her feet, to the horses that had learned to know her voice, farewell was given. The manner of it alone troubled her. They would call her ingrate in the house; she must permit the word, for she could find no other way.

'Oh! God knows it is hard enough; they will never understand me—they have never understood me from the first. And yet I must—I must for Jerome's sake.'

It was a piteous word, uttered aloud as she stood at the stable door, listening eagerly for Leslie's footstep on the path. And when an answer to it reached her ears, she turned as though one had struck her on the face. She thought herself to be alone—but the Archduke stood at her side, and his was the voice she had heard.

'Miss de Berthier,' he said, and that was all.

She did not know how to answer him. There, before her, was an erect old man, with hands outstretched, and love and pity for her in his kindly eyes.

'Miss de Berthier—Féo,' he said, 'help me to make my son happy. I wish it.'

She sank at his feet weeping.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE END OF THE PLAY

IN the winter of the year, five months after Féo had quitted the Château de Joux, there was a great reception at the palace of the Prince of Lichtenstein, which lies near the western gate of the Prater in Vienna. Many from the most exclusive society in Europe went to the Prince's house, carried there by the hope of meeting the wife of Jerome of Maros, and of seeing one whose romantic history had delighted the ready tongue of rumour. Ministers and diplomatists, great dames who ruled the social city, the archbishop and the canons, officers of the Cuirassiers, the outposts of the privileged, flocked to the palace upon that winter's day, and discussed as they went the curiosity which sent them.

'She has come from Geneva. They spent the honeymoon there—in a cottage. Romantic—*hein?* It was his idea—but he was always a dreamer. They say that she is related to the Mornays. A beautiful woman, my dear.'

'Not so quickly, not so quickly. Let us see

her first. For my part, I believe nothing. When a man marries a singer, he always discovers that she is of noble blood. The Archduke was right to say "no." But he has a son who will not listen. Ah, my dear, marriage is a strange thing nowadays! They are letting us choose our own husbands—and what will become of the others? I should die of *ennui* if I had married the man I wanted.'

Thus two dames—who mounted the marble staircase of the palace; but elsewhere, the talk was all of Féo. A great singer, some said; others declared her to be a consummate actress. Women spoke of the old Count, and remembered him as adventurer or merely charlatan. Certainly, the girl had played her cards well. She had outwitted the old Archduke and brought him, servient, to her feet. Another woman would have been content with an out-of-the-way ceremony before some obliging priest; but not so this singer. She was Jerome's wife beyond dispute. There had been a service in the great cathedral, the Archbishop had married them, the Archduke had taken her to the church. A clever woman—undoubtedly one to provoke this curiosity.

In the music-room of the palace, a lofty apartment with many chandeliers, and chairs canopied as thrones, and a garish ceiling which French

artists had painted, the curiosity of Prince Lichtenstein's guests was gratified. Every Wednesday, as the cynics avowed, the musical amateurs of the city were permitted in this room to show how great was the gulf which divided them from their professional brethren. Poets, to whom the magazines were closed books, here recited their odes to Spring and the muses ; here were heard the dilettanti who patronised the arts, but were by the arts unpatronised. If few listened to the clamour of genius, music, at least, stimulated conversation and permitted many a wit to gather profit of his long-studied impromptu. All that was best in the society of Vienna was to be heard or seen in the Prince's *salons* during these hours of loquacious strife and musical stress. Scandalous chronicles, the discreet banter of merry priests, the persiflage which delights the shallow, helped the success of the *matinées*. The very latest news of the Emperor, the newest gown from Paris, the prettiest story from the theatres,—you heard them all while the poets babbled on and the composers waged war upon the offended pianoforte. But never was there a prettier story than that of Féo, the singer—a story as Vienna knew it the twentieth time when Jerome brought his wife from Italy.

Féo stood upon the Archduke's right hand, a

pretty figure in a gown of green and gold. She wore no jewels, needed no other ornament than that of her abundant hair, and of the bright, laughing eyes, which seemed to tell, now of the shadows of her life, now of its joys. From time to time she would exchange a swift glance with Jerome; nor could she conceal that triumph of the hour which gave her the right so to stand side by side with him. For the rest, it may be that she did not realise the scene or its meaning. In the chalet above the lake of Geneva, where she had first known the whole truths of her love, there had been few to remind her of the greater world which marriage must open to her. But here, in Vienna, she awoke, rudely almost, to hear the first message of victory, to flinch before the homage which was her due. They called her 'Princess,' and she would run away to her room to laugh at her own conceit, or to ask herself if she were really that Féo who had lived in the garrets of London but a year ago. The light and glitter of the new world blinded her. She clung to Jerome as one cast out to a strange city, wherein he was her only friend. In other hours, she would dream of the old life, of its degradations and its hopelessness; and awake from her sleep affrighted; nor believe the truth until Jerome took her in his arms and kissed her to

remembrance. Each day the joy of morning was the sure knowledge that never again would the night return. She had come out of the darkness to this kingdom of her imagination. But the village, and not the city, seemed to her the truer home of love abiding.

Gaudy uniforms moved about her in Prince Lichtenstein's *salons*. The old Archduke stood proudly at her side, and said to all the world, 'My daughter.' Jerome, himself, was the same matter-of-fact, unemotional fellow he had ever been ; but he, too, could flush as he looked down upon the sweet face of his wife, and so answered for all time the tongue of rumour which long had slandered him. Everywhere about him in the great rooms the friends and enemies of his house discussed the romance which had brought Féo to Vienna. But her presence was his victory, and, conscious of it, he stood defiantly at the bar of social justice. In his way he was grateful to her for that very triumph which was the due of her beauty. 'They cannot help it, Féo,' he said ; 'see how they fall down and worship you.'

She answered him with a look wherein he read all her heart ; and afterwards, when the last of the musicians had put away his fiddle, and the last of the poets had condescended to admit that he was a genius, Jerome took her to the gardens of the

palace, and there she confessed those intimate things of which he heard delightedly. She feared for herself, for him, she said. There was always a voice to tell her that she was the one without the wedding garment. His friends were kind, but if they spoke all——! A deeply sensitive character anticipated an antagonism which no other contemplated.

‘They are kind to me—but do they mean it, dear? What they are saying of me now? What do they think of me? If one could only know! Oh, I was happier at Montreux—I shall never forget those days! And people were not three hundred years old there. My father used to say that no one was received in Vienna unless his nobility was three hundred years old. And I am only twenty-five.’

Jerome, listening sympathetically, drew her closer to him.

‘It was a triumph, little wife, a triumph for us both. Oh, I know! I have seen so many days like this. To-morrow, the world will talk of nothing else but Féo, and I shall listen. It must talk of her. When our house is ready for us, we will open the doors, and you will see who comes in. Do not think they are kind to you for my sake. Society, which is the sham of life, criticises the women first. It will criticise Féo now, and I shall laugh to read. It cannot help it, dearest ;

I have brought you here because I knew what must be—success, success always. Afterwards we will go to Montreux to think of it. If we stay here a little while and do many things we do not want to do, it is for my father's sake. He wishes you to be in Vienna. After all, the sacrifice is not so hard—a great many fine houses, dinners everywhere, the theatre—new gowns from Paris. Will you live through that, Féo?’

She raised her lips to his and kissed him.

‘One of the martyrs—and oh, so happy, Jerome, so happy! The night was long, but the day has come. Dear love, it will never be night any more.’

He answered her with a lover's caress; and after a whispered word of content, he told her of other things.

‘There was a letter from the château to-day,’ he said; ‘old Leslie is there and intends to become a fixture, I believe. Madame will weep if it goes through without an intrigue. But I imagine that Leslie is settled this time. We shall have Victorine here for a honeymoon before the spring. You always promised that, Féo.’

‘Because I was a woman,’ she answered laughingly; ‘the child had her picture of a lover ready long ago; but the face was nebulous. When Leslie came, she had only to say, “Here is the long lost one.” And she will love him passion-

ately because she has made up her mind to it. Dear little Victorine, she must be happy !'

'We will take it for granted. The man does not count in such a case.'

'Oh, but Leslie counts always! I am not afraid for him. He takes things as he finds them. He would have taken me once in an old hat and a Scotch overcoat very much too large for me—but, you see, my picture was already drawn, dear. And he will make a model husband. He always did what I told him—even when I said "Go away." There's a man for you.'

'A censure by comparison. I, at least, never do what I am told. How often you used to say "Go away" to me, Féo.'

She sighed.

'But I will never say it again.'

He put his arm about her, and together they returned to the palace. The lamps were lighted then ; all the splendour of the vast rooms asserted itself to be the enemy of night. And to Féo it seemed that a greater world was opening to her eyes ; a new country of her dreams, a habitation peopled by strange figures, a dominion of which she must be the mistress. The immensity of the change awed her. The garish lights of her triumph blinded her timid eyes. By love had she come to this kingdom. The gifts of love should make her worthy. Féo, the singer, lived no more, she

said. In the heart of the man she had died, as in his heart the new Féo must be born.

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At the same hour in London, old Georges de Berthier had gone to his club to tell any who would listen to him of his daughter's reception in Vienna, and of the Empress's kindness to her. No longer did he forget that France had called him Count, and had written the story of his forefathers in the annals of the nation. 'We are of the Mornays,' he would declare proudly; 'with our blood we bought liberty. In Vienna they know us. My daughter's name is on every tongue. Every door is open to her. I am too old to go there—but she is very good to me. She is a great singer, my daughter—a great artist has been lost to the world; it is destiny. I do not complain. I shall live and die alone, but she will be happy. And she will honour my name. She will never forget.'

The few listen and pass on; but elsewhere, none hear the name of Féo, the singer.